

WOBBLES INVADE STARBUCKS • YOUTUBE IN MEWORLD

OCTOBER 2006

# IN THESE TIMES

WHY BUSH GIVES  
PAKISTAN A NUCLEAR PASS

TRACKING THE CIA  
TORTURE FLIGHTS

## Year of the **DONKEY?**

THOMAS F. SCHALLER AND DAVID SIROTA REPORT

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## The Abramoff Babies

**I**N 1972, AFTER Richard Nixon crushed George McGovern by 503 electoral votes, the press rushed to declare the Democratic Party dead. Yet two short years later, Nixon was gone, Watergate and its associated crimes were exposed, and the Democrats had a banner year, gaining 49 seats in the House and five in the Senate. At the time, the mid-term victories seemed like the beginning of a new era and, predictably, the press lavished sympathetic coverage on the 74 freshmen Democratic lawmakers, dubbing them the “Watergate babies.”

But 1974 proved to be a false dawn. The Watergate babies ran and won on a platform of “reform,” but it was the kind of reform they pursued that proved to be most consequential. In his masterful book *The New Politics of Inequality* (1984), former *Washington Post* reporter Thomas B. Edsall distinguished between two types of reform, “procedural” and “substantive.” The former aim to achieve some kind of “ethical, moral or at least behavioral improvement in the conduct of politicians,” while the latter “attempt to use the government to correct a compelling social or economic problem and often involve[s] the alteration of the relationship between citizen and state.”

For freshman congressmen like Paul Tsongas and former Bush transportation secretary Norm Minetta (both of whom were elected from traditionally Republican districts), procedural reform was by far the more attractive route. It let them deliver on their campaign promises to clean up Washington, without threatening the financial interests of their upper middle class constituents. And so, as Edsall noted, while Congress took up campaign finance reform and ethics regulations, “labor law revision and election-day registration ... consumer protection, hospital cost containment, and national health insurance—all ended up on the cutting room floor.”

It’s hard to blame the Watergate babies. In hewing to the goo-goo line they were likely representing what their constituents wanted. But all of this is of particu-

lar relevance now as the Democrats head into a midterm election with the Republican Party’s popularity at a six-year low and numerous GOP politicians under investigation or indictment for corruption. Should the Democrats win one or both houses of Congress (and no one should underestimate the Democrats’ ability to underperform), it is likely that they will devote much of their agenda to restoring accountability and oversight to a government that sorely needs it. But the class of 1974 should serve as a reminder that while procedural reform is necessary for redistributing power in the country, it is not sufficient. One can imagine a spate of procedural reform bills that disinfect Capitol Hill, but do nothing to suture closed the yawning gap between the rich and rest of us that the GOP has worked so hard to open up.

There are several obvious substantive reforms that Democrats should pursue: repealing the bankruptcy bill, undoing the tax cuts for the wealthy and forcing a vote on some system of universal health care. But any Democratic caucus will have a non-trivial number of members recently elected from moderate swing districts, representatives like Illinois’ Melissa Bean, who in 2004 unseated 35-year incumbent Republican Phil Crane in the Chicago suburbs. As a representative of a district with a majority of registered Republicans, Bean has voted with the GOP majority for the bankruptcy bill, for the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit that barred the government from negotiating bulk drug prices and for CAFTA.

The specter of a Congress with a dozen more Melissa Beans might at first seem a Pyrrhic victory, but it merely shows that pushing the party to stand up for progressive values isn’t a project that comes and goes in two-year cycles. After the election, it will fall to the great mass of unelected progressives—from the net-roots to organized labor—to prevent this generation’s Melissa Beans from becoming the next generation’s Norm Minettas.

—Christopher Hayes

# IN THESE TIMES

“With liberty and justice for all...”

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# mixed reaction

## QUID PRO QUO

### THE QUID:

Political scandal aficionados might recall Rep. John Sweeney (R-N.Y.), who in April was caught on film, appearing multiple sheets to the wind as he chilled with frat boys during a kegger at Union College. But the Greeks on campus aren't his only friends. The National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) has not only made Sweeney one of the top recipients of its campaign contributions, but twice lent him a yacht to hold fundraisers on.

### THE QUO:

These contributions, of course, had no bearing on Sweeney's decision in May to introduce a bill, which the NMMA helped draft, that would give tax breaks to boat manufacturers who choose not to pass the cost of life jackets on to consumers.

On Nov. 7, it appears voters in New York's 20th District will get to answer the age old question, "What do you do with a drunken sailor?"

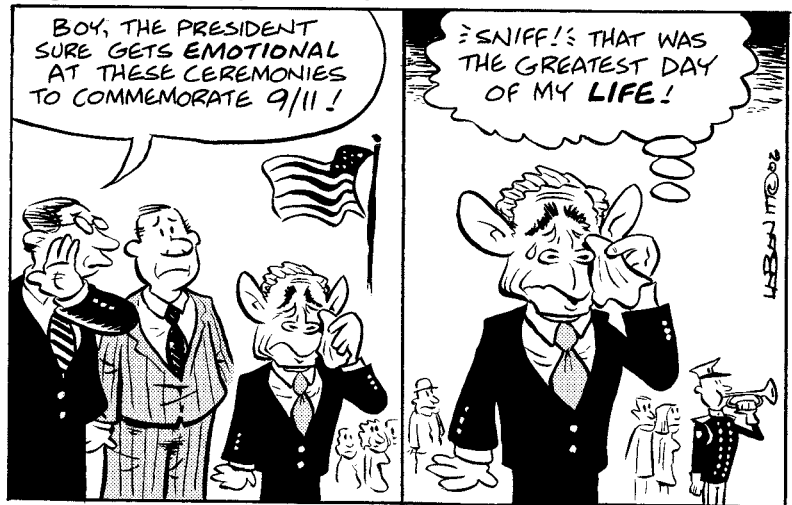
“

It's like my man has no marbles up there ... My man is just running up there crazy and the things he's doing are crazy ... Ain't nobody feelin' that war.

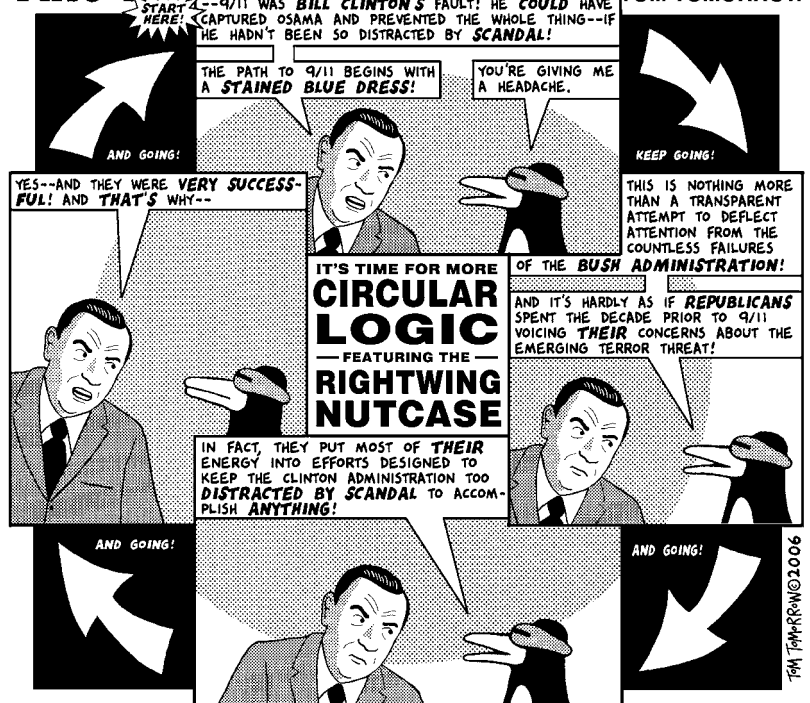
”

—SEAN “P. DIDDY” COMBS, HIP-HOP MOGUL, SPEAKING TO THE WASHINGTON EXAMINER ABOUT PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

### LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



### THIS MODERN WORLD BY TOM TOMORROW



## the lexicon

### **habeas corpus: legal term**

#### **Definition:**

The right to challenge your detention in a court of law.

#### **Usage note:**

Consult the Bush administration as to applicability if subject of sentence is an "enemy combatant."

# letters



## Much Bigger Than Hip-Hop

After reading “Bigger Than Hip-Hop” (September), I was glad that some of the Hip-Hoppers who are our children and grandchildren are waking up and realizing that you can’t sing and dance your way to freedom. Economic, social and political freedom, equality and justice are not for sale in Aisle 5 at Wal-Mart. P. Diddy and other hip-hop millionaires have enough money to party, sail on yachts and throw-down at a chalet in the south of France, but they seem to have no interest in using their money or power to change the disastrous economic, political and social conditions of the majority of black people.

Members of the National Hip-Hop Political Convention and other concerned youth must join in the fight for economic, social, and political freedom and independence. The fight will be hard, but we can win. My advice to the National Hip-Hop Political Convention membership is this: You can’t do it alone. You

must solicit the aid and support of all segments of the community, the old as well as the young. Yes, many of the leaders of previous generations have bought into the “American Scheme,” but other brothers and sisters have not and they are willing and able to help you. Most important, you must teach and train your children that the road to equality and justice is long and arduous and that the battle for freedom is neverending. However, with the help of God, commitment, dedication and unity, we can win. Good luck, young brothers and sisters. As you say, I got your back.

*Ellis Hutchinson  
Dayton, Ohio*

## More on I.F. Stone

In regards to Steve Weinberg’s “I.F. Stone: Iconic Muckraker,” (September), I.F. Stone once visited Palomar College, a community college in San Marcos, Calif., to give a talk to our student body. The Dean of Instruction and I, an engineering professor, took him out to lunch. He wanted Mexican food, so we went to a restaurant in nearby Vista. While we were munching tortilla strips, a young man at a nearby table sent over a note, “Aren’t you I.F. Stone?” Izzy went over and chatted with him until our lunch arrived.

Izzy was a delightfully honest curmudgeon. When his eyesight deteriorated to the extent that he had trouble reviewing *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, he retired—to learn Greek so that he could refer to first-hand references

when writing the extraordinary book *The Trial of Socrates*.

*Bill Bedford  
Vista, Calif.*

## Don’t Forget the Steelworkers

In Jane Slaughter’s “After the Deluge” (September), she mentions SEIU and LIUNA doing good works in the post-hurricane region, but I noted that she did not mention any AFL-CIO unions (other than their construction funding). The Steelworkers were more than busy down there too. We sent HAZMAT gear, training materials and a squadron of people to assist in safe, healthy cleanup and reconstruction.

*Jim Frederick  
Safety and Environment  
Assistant Director,  
USW Health  
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

## Unprofessional Doesn’t Equal Plagiarism

Susan Douglas’ “Plagiarists: Catch Your Own Clue” (September) hopelessly confuses the law on this subject with mere professional ethics or courtesy. Under the law, no one can acquire an intellectual property right of any kind in facts. No matter how much work someone has done digging a particular fact out of an old archive or out of a live person in an interview, that fact still belongs to everyone equally and we all remain completely free to publish it and use it for any purpose we like. Doing so is neither morally nor legally reprehensible. It

is certainly not plagiarism. It is, of course, an act of courtesy, and may be required by professional rules of ethics to acknowledge the work of previous researchers by mentioning them as a source when using facts painstakingly dug up by them, but failing to do so is no violation of law and should never be called “plagiarism.”

*Dallis Radamaker  
Via e-mail*

## Upright, Not Upside Down

Dave Mulachey’s “The Sticky Wiccan” (“Appallo-Meter,” August) held a glaring error. Although the Wiccan symbol is a pentacle, it is not the upside down pentacle that he described (which popular culture holds to be the symbol of rebellion).

The pentacle that should have appeared on Sgt. Patrick D. Stewart’s grave is the upright five-pointed star in a circle that denotes the cosmic man, and a symbol of the 5 elements. I am sorry about the death of Sgt. Stewart. Please, for him, and the other 1,800 wiccans in the armed forces, recognize that this was a totally wrong description of their holy symbol.

*Carol Williams  
Barrington, R.I.*

## The Grossness of Guantánamo

Congratulations on a very interesting and important edition (July)! I do, however, have a couple of gripes about Steve Weinberg’s review, “The Senselessness of Guantánamo.” Joseph Margulies’ *Guantánamo and the*

*Abuse of Presidential Power* is a very important book everyone should read. While Weinberg says it is "difficult to complete because of its technical language and unremitting depressing message," I found it an easy-to-read and spellbinding page-turner. It was also surprising to read that Weinberg thinks that Manguiles found the treatment of prisoners "probably illegal" with the extensive documentation of routine torture, coupled with many legal citations, Manguiles provides. "Grossly illegal" would be much more appropriate!

I was also disappointed to see Weinberg give credibility to the Bush junta's bogus notion that "human rights violations are a small price to pay for information that might help prevent terrorism" when it is more likely that the abuse of prisoners at Guantánamo and

elsewhere will take a much higher toll than the tiny value of possible "useful" information (which Manguiles finds to be negligible). We are creating the "ticking bomb" we fear! We are not producing a bunch of happy campers!

Steve Juniper  
Berkeley, Calif.

#### EDITORS NOTE:

In the September issue, an editorial error led to the following paragraph being dropped from Susan Douglas' "Plagiarists: Catch Your Own Clue:"

"Warner's publishers insisted she had turned in her book 14 months prior to publication and thus could not have known about ours; this despite the fact that her research assistant emailed me a year before our book came out to ask for some of our materials."

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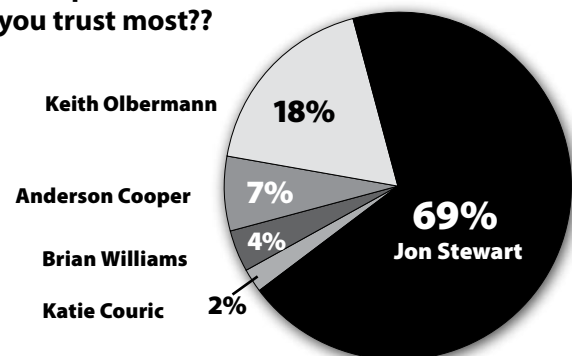
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In Chicago's Logan Square, pictured here, Starbucks workers have joined the IWW.



## Starbucks Gets Wobbly

**Embattled baristas at the coffee giant turn to the Industrial Workers of the World.**

BY MISCHA GAUS

**W**HEN JOE TESSONE and his fellow Starbucks baristas walked into a pep rally with management at their store in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood in August, the bosses were ready.

A trio of higher-ups passed around copies of the preamble to the constitution of the Industrial Workers of the World and warned the hourly workers against the radicalism of the old anarchist-socialist One Big Union.

The managers told the "partners"—the company's sobriquet for a workforce that baristas say is entirely part-time—that the CEO and chairman carry the same benefits package as the baristas.

That argument didn't hold much water for Tessone. "It's the illusion of equality," he says. "Do they struggle to pay rent at the end of the month? Do they struggle to buy groceries at the end of the week?"

Sick of waiting for modest demands to be met, the baristas weren't buying the packaged spiel. Instead, they an-

nounced they were joining the IWW, intent on returning some meaning to the National Labor Relations Act's call for "mutual aid or protection."

The nation's 71-year-old foundational labor document applies to all workers, not only those who can arduously prove a majority of their colleagues want a union. The baristas don't want an election with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) or a certified bargaining unit. They're using a tactic popular before the Depression, solidarity unionism, in which a minority of workers act in concert and issue demands even if management doesn't recognize their union—which Starbucks does not.

But the Chicago baristas aren't alone: Six New York City Starbucks have affiliated with the IWW in two years of campaigning, and the Wobblies take credit for three city-wide pay increases there. Already in Chicago, where the starting wage is usually \$7.50 an hour, the baristas have won safety improvements and scheduling changes.

"We're able to act quickly and we're able to make decisions within our stores, and we don't have to wait for court decisions," Tessone says. "In the retail and service industry, there's a high turnover rate. There's just not time to wait. We have to organize ourselves and act on the job to get our demands met."

Starbucks exacts a price for shop actions. Daniel Gross, an IWW Starbucks Union organizer, says four New York baristas have been fired in the past year for union activity, including himself in August. The company settled unfair labor practice charges with three workers in March, leading to about \$2,000 in back pay and promises not to bribe or threaten baristas. Tessone says Starbucks is using one-on-one meetings to pressure his coworkers. Starbucks' settlement admitted no guilt. A Starbucks spokesman told *In These Times*, "We firmly believe that our work environment, coupled with our outstanding compensation and benefits, make unions unnecessary at Starbucks. Starbucks takes very seriously its legal obligations and does not take action or retaliate against employees who express support for unions or take part in union activity."

Aggressive anti-union tactics have become the norm in the United States, from no-holds-barred outlets like Wal-Mart to image-obsessed corporations like Whole Foods. Labor law is permissive of abuse, so much so that a landmark 2000 Human Rights Watch report found 24,000 workers fired for organizing in a year, just one symptom of what it called the "culture of near-impunity" governing management's attacks on union efforts.

The Bush administration has helped tip the scales further against novel efforts like the Starbucks union. The NLRB ruled in 2004 that nonunion workers can no longer accompany each other into investigatory meetings with bosses. Commonly known as "Weingarten rights," they have been extended to and stripped from nonunion workers four times in the last 30 years. Solidarity unions often invoke them to document management's browbeating and witness disciplinary investigations.

Joel Rogers, a professor of law, political science and sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, who has



examined flexible forms of organization, says workers and unions shouldn't focus on the NLRB but on finding ways to defuse intense employer opposition. For example, unions might invite workers who want changes in their work place but who haven't won (or have lost) formal union representation to join the union and become involved.

Another example retail workers can draw from is the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY), which has won six campaigns in five years against restaurant conglomerates in the city through a combination of direct action and lawsuits. The group—which is friendly with the hospitality union UNITE-HERE—brings together restaurant workers, many of who are undocumented immigrants, to resolve concerns about working conditions as well as to file class-action lawsuits. The Center has secured more than \$300,000 in back wages and discrimination complaints, brokered managerial agreements to respect wage, hour and benefit laws, and opened a collectively managed restaurant of its own.

"Before even thinking about unioniza-

tion, the standards of the industry have to come up, so that it's not acceptable anymore to discriminate or break the law," says Saru Jayaraman, ROC-NY's executive director. "If we want to see any kind of power built for workers in this industry in our lifetime, we have to think about alternative models."

Old labor is starting to listen. In August, the AFL-CIO signed an agreement with the National Day Labor Organizing Network, signaling new intentions to partner with a group labor embraced only six years ago. Although the estimated 118,000 day laborers won't join or pay dues, the worker centers marshalling increasing numbers of the laborers can access some services, like the AFL's pro-bono labor lawyers.

The Wobblies, of course, have big plans of their own.

"What corporate retail wants is complete tyrannical control," Gross says. "It's something previous generations of workers didn't stand for—and neither should we." ■

**MISCHA GAUS** covers labor, trade and other concerns of the economy. He lives in Chicago.

## SOSing the Vote

**M**ARK RITCHIE KNOWS how to get people to the polls. In 1986, he founded the League of Rural Voters and in 2004, he founded November 2, a nonpartisan voter registration that registered 5 million voters. So this year, instead of returning to his job at the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, he decided to run for secretary of state.

"I became aware that free and fair elections are the way we pick policymakers who really matter," says Ritchie. "The secretary of state in my state, like in other states, had transformed her office into a partisan arm of the Republican Party. Nonpartisan administration of voting, he says, is the only way to guarantee "free and fair elections to pick the policy makers who then make the rules about food and agriculture and trade."

An elected office in 38 states—secretaries of state implement election-related legislation, such as the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), hire and train poll workers and vet new voting technologies. The mechanics of voting are in-

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**Democrat Mark Ritchie of Minnesota**

creasingly a concern for Americans. In August, a Zogby poll found that 60 percent of those surveyed were aware of reported problems with electronic technology and 92 percent supported election transparency.

Ritchie is one of four secretary of state candidates supported by the political action committee 21st Century Democrats. Their new secretaries of state campaign, says 21st Century President Kelly Young, came about when the group reviewed its election strategy in the wake of the 2004 election. They found that although they'd met all of their tactical electoral goals, the country still lacked a strong progressive leadership.

They drafted new goals, including an ambitious target: to have 98 percent of the country voting by 2024. In light of the group's concerns about campaign financing, redistricting and access to polls, secretary of state races were a natural focal point. So far, Young says, the campaign has been well-received by voters, in part because it focuses on strong candidates, not red state/blue state politics. "Democrats or Republicans will care about secretary of state races in the states that they don't control. Clearly, that's not our focus, or we wouldn't be in Minnesota or Massachusetts. Our real goal is to find secretaries of states who really want to do innovative work, who can be models for the whole country."

Young says secretary of state races offer a chance to restore faith in the voting process. "If people are left with the taste of Ohio and Florida, and frankly, they are, they lose faith in the whole process.

The very minimum should be 'Are we protecting people's right to vote?' Then it should be 'How do we engage people civically, so they are voting?' That's what these candidates are about."

Ritchie's plan to transform the Minnesota secretary of state's office begins with eliminating partisan staffing of the office. It's a government-wide problem he sees across the nation. "It's the Katrina effect," Ritchie says. "It's not just that political appointees are partisan, and try to make decisions that help one party, they often don't have the skills, expertise and knowledge to be good at their jobs." If elected, he plans to combat selective implementation of legislation, like HAVA, that should be protecting voters. Ritchie also hopes to link up voting registration to drivers' licenses, create voting centers to eliminate problems with incorrect polling places and provide early voting options for those with multiple jobs. "These reforms are important to make sure that in an independent-minded state like Minnesota that all the citizens feel the office is representing their interests on a nonpartisan basis, not just a bipartisan basis."

The other three candidates in 21st Cen-

tury Democrat's campaign have similar backgrounds in promoting citizen involvement and voting rights. Debra Bowen, running in California, is campaigning on her work with consumer protection and government openness. As a member of the state legislature, she has authored bills that provided citizens with electronic access to the legislative process. In Ohio, Jennifer Brunner is a former judge, who has served on a county board of elections and served as legal council for several campaigns. John Bonifaz, who, on Sept. 19, lost an uphill primary race against a Democratic incumbent in Massachusetts, is one of the founders of the National Voting Rights Institute, which helped lead the fight for a recount in Ohio following the 2004 presidential election.

Other PACs are getting in on the action as well. The Secretary of State Project, founded by former MoveOn staffer James Rucker, is pushing seven secretary of state races around the country, and providing an online donation portal to funnel money to the campaigns. In early September, Democracy For America, the group founded by Howard Dean, announced its support for four secretary of state candidates. Mark Ritchie and Jenni-

## act now



### FROM FARM TO FAMILY

In 1994, Food Share, a Canadian philanthropy, assembled 40 boxes of mostly Ontario-grown produce to distribute to low-income families in Toronto. Today volunteers at the group's Good Food Box deliver more than 4,000 boxes to families in 200 Ontario communities every month. In addition to providing healthy food, the Good Food Box helps the rural economy. "The program provides farmers, who are often low-income themselves, access to better market share," says Debbie Fields, the group's executive director. Prices start at \$12 Canadian per box. To learn more, visit [GoodFoodBox.com](http://GoodFoodBox.com).

fer Brunner are the only two candidates to be promoted by all three groups.

"The only means we have of defending ourselves is the vote, and if you want to throw out or hold accountable leaders who are not doing what you want around Katrina, or the Iraq war, the vote is your only mechanism," says Ritchie. "When you begin to perceive that your vote is being manipulated, it's a sign of worry."

—Phoebe Connelly



International Brotherhood of Teamsters President James P. Hoffa

## Teamsters Face a Contentious Election

FOR ALL OF his working life, like his father before him, John Thyer, 52, has been a Teamster. As principal officer of his St. Louis-based local union of carhaulers, Thyer supported James P. Hoffa in his winning bid for president in 2001. But as the Teamsters send out mail ballots for top international union officers to 1.4 million members around the country in October, Thyer is running as a vice-presidential candidate on a slate opposing Hoffa.

"Yeah, sure I supported Hoffa," Thyer says. "I feel like a fool, but I did. But it's never too late to do the right thing. I bought into the hype, the smoke and mirrors. I really thought they were going to do what they said they'd do, but they did nothing. Our health and welfare and pensions have been cut. There's a lack of representation for members, lack of acknowledgement that there even are members in this union."

With his famous name, the powers of incumbency, apparent support of most elected union officials and staff, and lots of money, Hoffa goes into the election as the favorite. His opponent, Tom Leedham, president of an Oregon local, has run against Hoffa twice before, winning about 38 percent of the vote in 1999 and 35 percent in 2001.

But despite his underdog status, nobody should rule out Leedham's chances. Hoffa not only has a name, but a record. According to Leedham, "It's a dismal record of failure."

Hoffa, Leedham charges, "pushed through the largest dues increase in the history of the union without a membership vote. We've had the largest pension cuts in history, when he ran on a pledge of no dues increase and '25 and out' [full pensions after 25 years of work]. He doubled dues, but there's been no doubling of union power. He called two strikes, and both were failures. He developed an anti-corruption program with great fanfare and spent \$15 million, but it collapsed when he blocked investigators when they were getting close to his office."

"It's a record of weak contracts, pension cuts and dues to support a lavish lifestyle of top officers," says Leedham, "With the number of international employees receiving multiple salaries increasing from 16 to 163. Teamster members are hungry for change."

Teamsters directly elect their top officers under rules established when the union's former leadership signed a federal consent decree in 1989 to avoid prosecution on charges of corruption and mob influence. In the first direct election in 1991, Teamsters voted for an insurgent, Ron Carey, backed by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). This rank-and-file group, founded in 1976, has fought for a more democratic, member-oriented union. Leedham directed the freight division under Carey, whose re-election in 1996 was overturned because his campaign staff had used union funds for Carey's race against challenger Hoffa.

Hoffa's campaign says that he has restored unity and financial stability to a union that was divided under Carey. And the campaign has tried to link Leedham to real and alleged problems of the Carey era and decried his support from TDU.

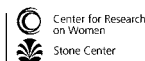
Although Hoffa's campaign claims to have negotiated outstanding contracts for freight truck and UPS workers, one

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of the biggest election issues may be the cuts in pensions and retiree health coverage provided by two of the biggest funds jointly managed by the union and companies. Those funds cover roughly 400,000 Teamsters, including many freight and UPS workers, who are among those most likely to vote in the election.

Last year, Hoffa was a key figure in the split of the AFL-CIO that led to formation of the Change to Win Federation. Leedham has expressed doubts about the rationale for the split, and a desire to negotiate unity in the labor movement. He champions greater mobilization of the members, both for contract fights (his model is the successful 1997 UPS strike) and for organizing. (He advocates hiring 1,000 Teamster members as organizers).

While Hoffa has increased the international union staff and budget for organizing and launched several new campaigns, the union has lost approximately 150,000 members during his tenure—although mergers of three small unions kept the union's net membership stable. Hoffa failed in his biggest organizing gamble: a three-year strike at Overnite, a trucking firm where Carey's team had begun to organize

several dozen worksites. At the union convention last June, Hoffa announced that he had won an agreement for collective bargaining recognition by checking union cards at the company (now a division of UPS), but it applies only to one terminal in Indianapolis that was recently organized.

Leedham may benefit from diminished enthusiasm for Hoffa even among officers nominally supporting him. In one indication of tensions within Hoffa's camp, one of his vice-presidents, Tyson Johnson, announced earlier this year that he would challenge Hoffa's re-election, but he later withdrew and is now running with Hoffa. Also, two independent vice-presidential candidates in the East (informally supported by Leedham) were prominent former Hoffa supporters. But the question for Leedham's campaign is not only whether Hoffa's one-time supporters have grown disgruntled with his record, but also how hopeful such members are that they can change their union.

"If people feel it's their union, Leedham will win," says TDU organizer Ken Paff. "But there's a lot of cynicism in the country, and that's what we're struggling with."

—David Moberg

## Wave of Party Switchers Hits Republicans

**A**TREND OF LOCAL, below-the-radar party-switches is undercutting Republicans as they face the sternest challenge in a decade to one-party control of Congress and several state legislatures. Such party-switching by elected officials often indicates that the label they are shedding has lost appeal and fore-shadows poor performance at the polls.

Some recent switchers are exiting GOP ranks with a bang. Distorted priorities, the federal deficit and the Iraq war are common themes in their announcements. And in a direct swipe at the far-right ideology that has become a governing credo in the Bush years, they cite intolerance in the party as the chief reason for leaving.

"The moderate Republican has been pushed aside for the extreme right wing," Oklahoma state Senator Nancy Riley told the Associated Press in August, when she became a Democrat. Riley represents a district in suburban Tulsa

## appall-o-meter

### 4.7 Custer Rides Again

Northern Virginia is chockablock with obscure little "consulting firms" chiseling unheard of amounts of money for dubious services to the American war effort, apparently with little fear of consequences. Occasionally a whistleblower or a crusading journalist spoils the party, but if the case of Custer Battles, LLC, is any indication, it's not for long.

According to a suit filed under a federal whistleblower statute, Custer Battles used the standard techniques—shell companies, bogus invoices—to overcharge the Coalition Provisional Authority for its work helping to establish a new Iraqi currency. A jury found against the company, levying a fine of \$10 million.

However, reports the Associated Press, a federal judge has overturned the judgment, arguing that while Custer Battles may have fleeced the CPA, plaintiffs failed to show that in doing so the firm was fleecing the American government. Damn that liberal bench!

### 3.8 Who's Your Flat Daddy?

The Maine National Guard has adopted

a novel way to comfort the families of hundreds of its soldiers serving overseas. As the *Boston Globe* reports, the guard has been supplying them with "flat daddies" and "flat mommies"—life-sized cutouts of deployed loved ones, mounted on rigid foam.

"He goes everywhere with me," Kay Judkins said of her flat hubby, "Slim Jim," whose flesh-and-bone, three-dimensional counterpart sweeps for mines in Afghanistan. "Every day he comes to work with me. ... I just bought a new table from the Amish community, and he sits at the head of the table. Yes, he does." Judkins even takes Slim Jim to confession with her.

Deeply disturbing? Yes. Potently metaphorical? Probably.

### 1.6 Painter of Fraud

Thomas Kinkade, "Painter of Light," may soon be entering his blue period ... or gray period, or whatever period it is when you get confined to the pokey. Kinkade, whose sobriquet derives from his saccharine portraits of lighthouses



and cottages and mountain cabins—all of them emitting improbable megawattages of yellow light—is being investigated by the FBI for defrauding investors in galleries that sold his work exclusively.

Several owners of Kinkade's "Signature" galleries, reports the *L.A. Times*, have brought civil cases against Kinkade and

top executives of Kinkade Co. for persuading investors under false pretenses and then ruining them financially by insisting on disastrous business practices. Two former owners of Kinkade galleries in California—now divorced—were awarded \$860,000 by an arbitration panel awarded early this year. The arbitrators found that Kinkade had used his soft-focus brand of fundagelical Christianity to create "a certain religious environment designed to instill a special relationship of trust" before going on to ream the couple.

"They really knew how to bait the hook," another former Kinkade gallerist told the *Times*. "They certainly used the Christian hook." Go figure.

—Dave Mulcahey

and has served as minority whip in a chamber that her former party was looking to take over in the fall election. She announced her defection after years of what she described as “abhorrent” treatment by Republican leaders who suffer a “lack of compassion for people.”

In central South Carolina, county prosecutor Barney Giese also switched parties. The law-enforcement pro is the son of Warren Giese, a longtime GOP state senator and revered football coach. His announcement upset Republican leaders, struggling to maintain one-party control in a state that Democrats added to their roster of early primary battlegrounds for the 2008 nomination.

“My relationship with some of the leaders of the Republican Party is damaged,” Giese told *The State*, a Columbia newspaper. “No one gets elected without bipartisan support. ... My conflict with them started with me being independent.”

On the other coast, Rodney Tom, a state representative in Washington, didn’t mince words when he left the GOP this spring. “I realized that the far right has complete control of the party,” he told the *Seattle Times* in announcing his switch.

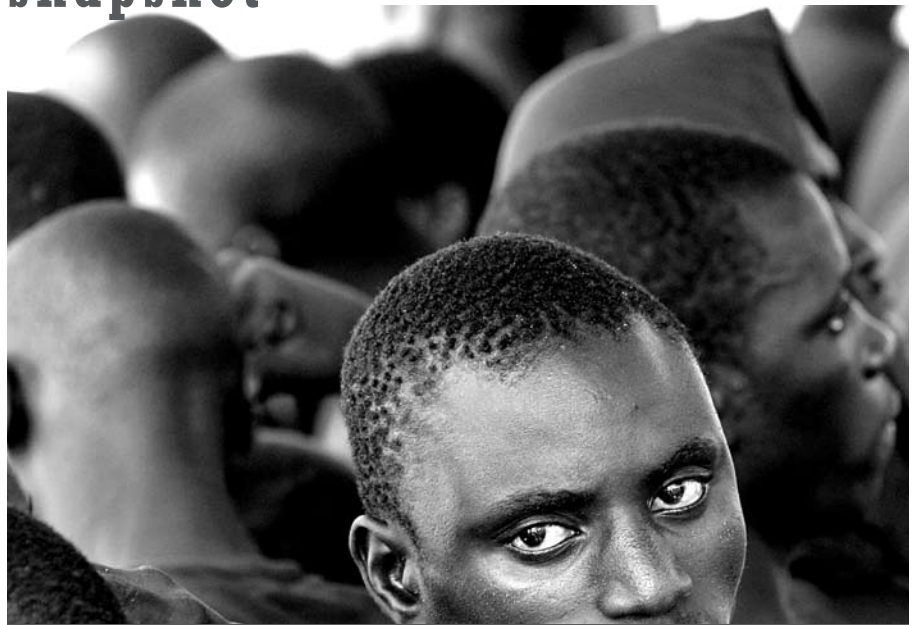
Now running for state Senate as a Democrat, he represents a district of suburbs that was once lopsidedly Republican. But Tom says voters there generally back abortion rights, nondiscrimination for gay people, balanced budgets and investment in state infrastructure, such as transportation projects. That has soured them on today’s conservatives. “For me to be effective for my constituents,” he added, “I need to be a Democrat.”

Tom’s switch underscores a shift in allegiances away from the GOP among well-educated, upper-middle class voters based in part on the strident antigay and anti-abortion stands of Republicans.

Begun in the Clinton years, this erosion of the conservative base has motivated some right-wing strategists to peddle the stances all the more ferociously in hopes of finding and winning over new converts from other demographic groups. It may pay short-term dividends. Bush strategist Karl Rove claims to have identified and successfully solicited votes from as many as 4 million new GOP voters in 2004.

Yet the stigma of pandering to intolerance can sear a negative after-image into the minds of other voters. That effect and friction from dealing with party leaders driven by rigid beliefs are two

## snapshot



**LOS CRISTIANOS, SPAIN—One of 104 would-be illegal immigrants intercepted at sea on Sept. 10 sits inside a Spanish Red Cross tent in the port of Los Cristianos on Tenerife in the Canary Islands. (Photo by Desiree Martin/AFP/Getty Images)**

factors consistently flagged by the party switchers. Showing up as much in red states as in blue, the pattern cannot be dismissed as a regional fluke.

In Idaho, Tony Edmondson, a former county commissioner, broke with the GOP in August. He criticized state lawmakers, who in the spring placed a ballot measure barring same-sex marriage before state voters in the fall. “The legislature decided to focus on issues of ideology and posturing ... instead of focusing on the people’s business,” he told the Associated Press. Edmondson is running for state senate as a Democrat.

In New Jersey, former state Assemblyman Paul R. D’Amato left the GOP, charging the party with operating a “closed shop that discourages individuality, discussion and openness.”

And party-switchers figure in two marquee races this fall. Former Kansas GOP chair Mark Parkinson has joined Democratic governor Kathleen Sibelius as her choice for lieutenant governor on her reelection ticket.

In Virginia, longtime Republican and Reagan-era secretary of the Navy Jim Webb is challenging incumbent U.S.

senator George Allen, a voting-rights foe sometimes pegged as an ’08 White House hopeful, in his hard-fought reelection bid. “National security policy under the Bush-Cheney Administration is in total disarray,” Webb said in an August speech. “There is no end in sight to the conflict in Iraq ... and homeland security is being neglected.”

The shift throws a wrench in the Republican machine as it rumbles across a troubled political landscape. The results of special elections for state legislature in the past year have showcased Democratic voting strength, even in areas the GOP has long dominated (see “GOP Trashed in Special Elections,” April 2006). Now another gauge indicates Republican political power at risk.

Twelve years ago, GOP leaders trumpeted a host of Democratic office-holders who had jumped ship as a grassroots rejection of Bill Clinton and his party. They went on to post huge gains in the ’94 mid-term elections. Now, as Nov. 7 nears, a similar dynamic of popular disaffection with Republicans is taking shape.

—Hans Johnson

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

## 9/11 Refracted in the Corporate Media



**K**ATIE COURIC, HER eyes thickly lined with black kohl, seemed to have one intention on the fifth anniversary of 9/11: to make us cry. After her debut, she and CBS were instantly criticized for turning their nightly news broadcast into a news magazine stocked with feel-good, soft-news features, and 9/11 was no different. After a story about how much progress has been made in Afghanistan (which directly contradict-

ed a piece that had aired on Couric's first night about the dangerous re-arming of the Taliban), Couric turned to a tear-jerking story (repurposed from the previous night's "60 Minutes") about a boy who had lost his father on 9/11 but had found a new father figure through a program called "Tuesday's Children."

We were also treated to an on-air op-ed by Rudy Giuliani (in CBS's new "Free Speech" segment), who insisted we must be unwavering in our fight against terrorism, as if we didn't know that. But the piece was also a veiled endorsement of the war in Iraq, which he linked to 9/11. "After September 11, we went on offense against the terrorists. We must remain on offense. ... If we remain steadfast, if we do not surrender to frustration and remain committed to overcoming terrorism, then those who died on September 11 will not have died in vain." Why do terrorists attack us? Giuliani intoned the same old bromide: "This is a war with people who seek to eliminate our most precious freedom." Perfect segue into Bush's widely flogged "non-political" address to the nation in which he insisted that the war in Iraq was crucial to protecting Americans from terrorism.

Like much of the broadcast media, the two dominant messages from CBS's commemoration of 9/11 were Cry, Cry, Cry and We Must Persevere in the War On Terror. Bathos trumped analysis and nowhere were we urged to think instead of feel. The most glaring omission was any reflection not on the road to 9/11, but the road since 9/11. Were such a piece to air, the news media's conduct of the past five years would not come off well at all.

A central text in the remembrances was ABC's controversial docudrama, *The Path to 9/11*. Denounced by Bill Clinton, Richard Clarke, Madeleine Albright and a group of historians for inserting scenes that never happened, ABC made minor adjustments that eliminated the most glaring falsehoods. But few have noted the broader

ideological work of the show. *The Path to 9/11*, written, we now know, by conservative Cyrus Nowrasteh, friend of Rush Limbaugh, is a passionate argument for executive power in the Dick Cheney mode and an indictment of the Fourth Amendment. At one point, when officials operating outside the United States are about to examine the laptop of a suspected terrorist, one of them complains that you could never get away with such a search in the United States without a warrant. Ergo, the constitutional prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures is cast as troublesome barrier to the war on terror.

Also left in the show was the lie that Bush authorized the shooting down of hijacked airliners by U.S. fighter jets. Such an order never came in real life, but clearly the conservatives behind *The Path to 9/11* long for such executive power

and decisiveness. In contrast, the docudrama failed to show Bush continuing to read *My Pet Goat* after learning of the attacks, or being swept off into hiding. This helps occlude the fact that the administration that has done more than any

**The two dominant messages from CBS's commemoration of 9/11 were Cry, Cry, Cry and We Must Persevere in the War On Terror.**

other to expand the powers of the executive was, at that moment, headed by someone who had no idea what to do.

How might the broadcast media have analyzed the path since 9/11 if it were non-commercial, not so craven for ratings and had the stomach for self-examination? Might we see an examination of the collapse of journalistic skepticism and backbone in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, or an expose of the Bush administration's blanketing the media with propaganda and PR techniques, or an explanation that Bush squandered every ounce of goodwill we had in the aftermath of 9/11, or a reflection on the unnecessary killing of so many U.S. troops and Iraqis, or a condemnation of our country's use of torture?

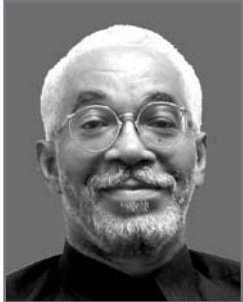
Indeed, the greatest irony here is that a "Path Since 9/11" could not be produced by the right wingers retained by ABC, as every single gambit they've attempted has blown up in their faces. Such a program, if ever made, would show the systemic bankruptcy of Bush's brand of chip-on-the-shoulder, Marie Antoinette conservatism.

The tragedy of 9/11, the one we did not hear about on this fifth anniversary, is not only the losses we sustained on that day, but the complete shredding of whatever remained of what many of us like to think of as American righteousness. And the tragedy is deepened by some in the media who still attempt to divert us with tears, with outright lies and with fantasies of the more authoritarian state that we should never, ever become. ■



BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

## The Neocons' Lexicon



**T**HE REPUBLICANS' DEPLOYMENT of the term "Islamofascism" to define the enemy in the Bush administration's war on terror is clearly an attempt to improve their prospects in the midterm elections. By conflating contemporary terrorist threats with fearsome historical enemies, the GOP seeks to divert attention from the increasingly unpopular occupation of Iraq.

But the adoption of this term also reveals the Bush administration's ideological disarray and the Republicans' political desperation.

Many pundits trace the neologism to historian Malise Ruthven, who used it in a September 1990 article in the *London Independent*. But Ruthven used it to describe authoritarian Muslim states like Morocco, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Stephen Schwartz, the neocon author of *Two Faces of Islam*, insists that he is the first Westerner to use the term in the contemporary context.

But the term gained its greatest currency in the lexicon of pro-war progressives Christopher Hitchens, Paul Berman and Ron Rosenbaum, to name three. They argued that the totalitarian aspirations of theocratic groups like al-Qaeda threatened the libertarian freedoms that are the legacy of the Enlightenment.

These polemicists were less concerned (at least, originally) with the geo-strategic issues that preoccupied the administration's neocon warmongers, so their arguments had some resonance on the secular left. After all, how could progressives oppose the theocratic agenda of the religious right within the United States and not reject similar developments elsewhere?

In Hitchens' last column for *The Nation*, he wrote "the theocratic and absolutist side in this war hopes to win it by exporting it here, which in turn means that we have no expectation of staying out of the war, and no right to be neutral in it."

By framing the war on terror as a struggle between the liberal soldiers of the Enlightenment and the dark forces of theocracy, these progressives gave cover to warmongers with rationales much less lofty. In fact, one of the major ironies is that their support has aligned them with right wing religious groups with their own theocratic agendas.

Until recently, the Bush administration and its corps of supplicants failed to utilize the arguments of these pro-war

progressives because of their anti-religious logic. Their hostility to religion, theoretically, should cause them to reject the president's notion of an America divinely guided to democratize the world.

But progressive supporters of the Iraq invasion apparently are willing to tolerate Bush's Messianic conceits. Even though the president describes the invasion and occupation of Iraq in increasingly Manichean terms with theological overtones, the secularist Hitchens remains an undaunted supporter.

Bush strategists likely reasoned they could co-opt the term "Islamofascist" for their own purposes since the pundits who popularized the term seem unconcerned with consistent political principle. What's more, the word helps the GOP frame its only remaining argument to convince the

U.S. public that the war in Iraq makes sense. Our fire-breathing enemies may live in different countries, like Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran, this line of argument runs, but they are all one: Islamofascists.

Many commentators have weighed in on the damage done

to historical understanding by falsely linking the state fascism of Germany, Italy and Spain to the theocratic prescripts of some radical Islamic movements. Several Muslim groups also have criticized the use of the neologism as a gratuitous insult to their religion. Why is there Islamofascism and no Germano-, Italo-, or Hispanic fascism, they ask?

Parvez Ahmed, chairman of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, told the AP that Bush's use of the term "contributes to a rising level of hostility to Islam and the American-Muslim community."

Many also find hypocrisy in hearing a term containing "fascist" being uttered by officials from an administration that ignores international law to invade a sovereign nation, tortures prisoners of war at secret sites and imprisons people without trial or evidence.

Certainly, there are troubling tendencies among the radical Muslims who increasingly see the United States as the enemy. Caught in colonialism's lingering legacy, they have gripes similar to the "communist" and "nationalist" dissidents before them. In those days, United States ignored their concerns and subverted their secular leadership. "Godless communism" was the enemy, so we encouraged piety.

Americans now are living with the results of that failed policy, having apparently learned little. Deploying focus group-tested words for political advantage, the Bush administration is seeding fields of antagonists yet to come. ■

**By conflating contemporary terrorist threats with historical enemies, the GOP is hoping to divert attention from the failed occupation of Iraq.**

BY GREGORY D. FOSTER

## "Route-Stepping" Our Way to WWII



**R**OUTE-STEP, MARCH" is a permissive military command that directs a marching formation to continue without a set cadence. So, "route-step" also is a common term of disparagement for sloppiness and indiscipline—an apt characterization, as it happens, for America's current response to world affairs. We little people, absent more vigilance and skepticism, are in danger of being route-stepped into World War III by our rulers and their

ideological acolytes.

If "World War III" sounds hyperbolic and alarmist, that's because it is. Precisely for that reason, it is the prevailing lingua franca of the Bush administration and those on the right who seek to solidify their hold on power by cowing the public.

President Bush himself, who has unwaveringly stuck to calling the hunt for terrorists the Global War on Terror, has recently taken up the claim that we now face World War III.

But the most outspoken proponent of this thesis is former U.S. House Speaker and putative presidential aspirant Newt Gingrich. In public appearances, interviews and newspaper commentaries, he has made the World War III mantra the centerpiece of a Churchillian patois designed to burnish his qualifications as a prospective commander in chief.

Speaking in apocalyptic terms of losing millions of Americans to weapons of mass murder, Gingrich would have us believe that all of the criminality, militarism and terrorism in the world—from North Korean missile firings, to Middle East violence, to Iraq and Afghanistan, to alleged terror plotters in Canada and England—is connected in some unified whole of civilizational conflagration. The only reasonable response is an all-out effort to achieve total victory.

Of course, proclaiming that we are at war, especially world war, strengthens the president's hand as commander-in-chief and his claims to concentrated power; rationalizes continued gluttonous defense spending and restrictions on civil liberties and dissent; puts Congress, the media and an opposition party devoid of all credibility on national security matters on the permanent defensive; and instills fear in an electorate thereby more willing to forsake popular sovereignty for Big Brother protection.

Moreover, to invoke World War III is to evoke World War II, the last great, nationally unifying, Manichean, total war against regnant evil personified by Hitler. To be able to compare an enemy figurehead like Osama bin Laden to Hitler,

characterize one's adversaries as fascist (Islamofascist), and accuse one's critics of being historically illiterate appeasers (in the manner of Neville Chamberlain), is to create a cosmic symmetry of fearful acquiescence.

As Gingrich has been the White House's de facto rhetorical proxy at home, Israel has been America's continuing military proxy in the Middle East—a provocateur extraordinaire whose recent military campaign in Lebanon well served the Bush administration's hopes for turning the rhetoric of world war into reality. There is a long-held, deeply internalized misconception among much of Washington's policy elite that Israel is supremely competent at dealing with terrorism. Exploiting this misconception, Israel acted as it invariably does (and as its Washington soulmates invariably do): politically, tactically and militarily, devoid of strategic comprehension,

sensitivity or insight. The result was a debacle that multiplied the strategically debilitating effects of America's Iraq debacle.

Political expediency, not strategic desiderata, clearly motivated both Israel's actions inside Lebanon and the Bush

administration's countenancing of those actions. Otherwise, both parties would have sought to:

- Strengthen Lebanon's government, rather than irreparably weaken it by destroying large segments of the country's infrastructure.
- Exploit the inherent disunity of international terrorism rather than give its disparate perpetrators grounds for common cause.
- Win the hearts and minds of people whose loyalties have now turned to Hezbollah and like-minded groups.
- Contribute to regional and global demilitarization through a measured, discriminating use of force that assiduously discriminated between combatants and non-combatants.

Clearly, two things characterize the Bush administration's approach to international affairs. First, the high politics of statecraft have given way to the low politics of partisan jockeying. Second, the strategic exercise of power has been overwhelmed by the tactical use of force—to the extent that our foreign policy has been completely militarized. The inevitable result, absent a countervailing exercise of democratic prerogative by the American people, will be the Third World War those now in power have set us up for. ■

**GREGORY D. FOSTER** is a professor at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University, Washington, D.C. The views expressed here are his own.

**Proclaiming that we are at war, especially world war, strengthens the president's hand as commander-in-chief and concentrates his power.**

LAURA S. WASHINGTON

## Year of the Black Candidate



**R**UN, JESSE, RUN! In September, on Chicago's South Side, the script was flipped. This time it's Junior who's aiming for the top of the ticket. The young-uns may be taking over. It's about time.

On Sept. 6, Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) beckoned the media to his front lawn in Jackson Park Heights to announce that if he can raise \$4 to \$6 million and register 100,000 new voters, he will run for mayor of Chicago.

The six-term congressman and first-born son of the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson Sr. hopes to take on the scion of another legendary political family, Richard M. Daley. It's almost certain Daley, Chicago's chief executive since 1989, will run for one more term in the February 2007 mayoral primary. A win would set him up to surpass the tenure of his father, Richard J. Daley, who died in 1976 after 21 years in office.

They called the senior Daley "the boss." Daley the younger has been dubbed "mayor for life." In recent months, however, his clout has faded in the face of a growing, multi-layered federal investigation into alleged corrupt hiring and contracting practices.

Jackson, 41, has hammered at Daley and a Democratic Party establishment that, he says, "is part of a prehistoric and bygone era that somehow slipped into the 21st Century." He suggests the Daley administration is neglecting the city's have-nots, and voters want change.

Two other African-American pols have already announced they will challenge Daley: Dorothy Brown, Cook County Clerk of the Circuit Court, and community activist Bill "Dock" Walls. Rep. Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.), a Puerto Rican who represents part of Chicago's North Side, is also mulling a run. Still, it's the prospect of a Daley/Jackson match-up that has the political junkies salivating.

From Chicago to Los Angeles to Newark, efforts like Jackson's may be signaling a changing of the guard. The fiery preachers who rely on race-based protest tactics are being eased aside by political professionals bearing arsenals of polls, mailing lists and PACs. For example, Adrian Fenty, the 35-year-old Democratic nominee who is looking like the certain winner in Washington D.C.'s mayoral race, is known to carry two Blackberries.

Don Rose, a Chicago-based political consultant and longtime Jackson-watcher, cites two developments: Barack Obama's elevation to a U.S. Senate seat in 2004 and Co-

rey Booker's capture of Newark's City Hall. A victory for Jackson may "represent the prospect of a new generation of black urban leadership," says Rose, an advisor to Harold Washington, who was elected Chicago's first black mayor on a progressive platform.

The pundits have already pegged 2006 as the Year of the Black Candidate, as a plethora of African-American hopefuls run for top tier slots nationwide.

Rep. Harold Ford Jr. (D-Tenn.) is looking to become the first black senator from the South since Reconstruction. Retired Pittsburgh Steeler Lynn Swann wants to unseat Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell. Ken Blackwell aims to be Ohio's next governor; ditto for Assistant U.S. Attorney Gen. Deval Patrick in Massachusetts. In Maryland, Lt. Gov. Michael Steele and former NAACP chief Kweisi

Mfume made respective bids in the Republican and Democratic senate primaries.

They represent a sign of political maturity and diversity in black leadership—three of them are Republican and only one, Mfume, is tied to the ossified civil rights establishment. That connection may have worked against him—he lost his Sept. 12 primary bid.

Jackson represents both the old and the new. He was elected in 1995 to represent Chicago's 2nd Congressional District, which spans the city's South Side and Southern suburbs. He has since crafted a solid progressive voting record, bolstered by a sophisticated political apparatus that employs internet-based fundraising and issue-based communications.

Jackson learned much at daddy's knee. His father, the founder of Rainbow PUSH, remains a civil rights icon who has advised and scolded presidents, run twice for president himself, and has traversed the world's troubled spots as an unofficial ambassador. However, the elder Jackson is also at the front of a withering line of '60s activists that don't connect with younger voters.

"Junior" must stretch way beyond the base of elderly and church-going blacks that know his father best. Mirroring the nation, Chicago's fastest-growing ethnic group is Latino. White progressives are another crucial constituency in building a cohesive progressive agenda.

In some circles, Jackson's controversial father may be a liability, and the son's ability to attract voters outside of the base is untested. He must burnish his progressive credentials and hone his vote-getting abilities to succeed. One thing's for sure: Get ready for some colorful and contentious political theatre. ■

**From Chicago to Newark, the fiery preachers are being eased aside by political professionals armed with polls, mailing lists and PACS.**



# THE FIRST STONE

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

## The Importance of Not Getting Over It



**I**N JUNE SEVEN STORIES Press published the book I co-authored with Steven F. Freeman, *Was the 2004 Presidential Election Stolen? Exit Polls, Election Fraud, and the Official Count*.

We had spent the previous year and a half examining the exit polls and learning about the problems posed by electronic voting.

I took up this task, devoting evenings and weekends to it, because I thought the subject was vitally important. Yet the months since the book's publication have been frustrating. No newspaper or magazine, from either the corporate or independent media sectors, has taken the subject seriously enough to review our book.

I had thought that with Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s article "Was the Presidential Election Stolen?," published last June in *Rolling Stone*, the topic would become part of a national debate. Yet the only media outlet that has given the subject serious consideration is Salon.com, where Farhad Manjoo slammed Kennedy's article and its thesis, and then refused to respond when Salon.com published a devastating critique of his argument by my co-author.

Why the silence? After talking to colleagues in the independent press, I have come to the conclusion that the possibility of a stolen election is not given credence for three reasons.

The first reason is pervasive, continuing ignorance about the 2004 exit polls and what they indicated. A prime example is the obituary written by *Washington Post* pollster Richard Morin on the death of Warren Mitofsky from an aortic aneurysm on September 1. Mitofsky, the father of exit polling, had boasted that of the 2,500 or so

exit polls he worked on only six were wrong. Here is what Morin wrote:

At the time of his death, Mitofsky found himself in the peculiar position of arguing for the inaccuracy of his own 2004 exit poll. That survey found John Kerry leading early on Election Day, only to lose his advantage when the actual ballots were counted.

Reading Morin, the reader would conclude that the exit polls indicated that Kerry was only leading "early on Election Day," when in fact by the end of Election Day the exit polls still had Kerry ahead in every state, particularly in the key 11 battleground states, and most particularly in the states of Nevada, New Mexico and Ohio.

That a discrepancy exists between the exit polls and the official count in the 2004 election is not a matter for debate. What is open for discussion is what caused the discrepancy.

One hypothesis is human error. This is the explanation preferred by Mitofsky. Speaking of the discrepancy, he said, "I just don't believe in conspiracies. I'm much more a believer in something practical, like incompetence." Mitofsky posited that the discrepancy was caused by more Democrats than Republicans filling out the confidential exit poll questionnaires.

In our book we spend 92 pages examining both Mitofsky's theory that Republicans refused to participate in the exit polls at a higher rate than Democrats and his explanation that "poorly trained interviewers" were to blame for this phenomenon. Using exit poll data released by Mitofsky, we conclude, convincingly I believe, that his incompetence hypothesis does not stand up to scrutiny.

An alternative hypothesis is that the exit polls were in fact accurate, and that the official vote was interfered with.

This raises the specter of a conspiracy. Mitofsky wasn't alone in wanting

nothing to do with the "C" word. Alexander Cockburn wrote in the Dec. 6, 2004 *Nation*, "As usual, the conspiracy nuts think plans of inconceivable complexity worked at 100 percent efficiency." His sentiments were echoed by ABC's Cokie Roberts, who explained, "This notion ... [t]hat there's just this vast conspiracy flies in the face of human experience. We've never known a conspiracy to work that well."

Yet on Election Day 2004, 64 percent of Americans voted on direct recorded electronic voting machines or optical-scan systems, both of which are vulnerable to hacking or programming fraud. And with these new technologies, it would only take a few people to steal an election.

**A**CCORDING TO A September 2005 investigation by Congress' Government Accountability Office, such systems contain flaws that "could allow unauthorized personnel to disrupt operations or modify data and programs that are critical to ... the integrity of the voting process."

Proof of this came on September 13 when Princeton University's Center For Information Technology Policy released the results of a new study, "Security Analysis of the Diebold AccuVote-TS Voting Machine," which found that the most commonly used electronic voting machine is vulnerable to programming fraud.

The researchers obtained a Diebold AccuVote-TS direct recorded electronic (DRE) voting machine. (They decline to say from whom.) After analyzing the machine's hardware and software, and subjecting the machine to a number of experiments, they reported, "We found that the machine is vulnerable to a number of extremely serious attacks that undermine the accuracy and credibility of the vote counts it produces."

The AccuVote-TS and the AccuVote-TSx are the most widely used electronic voting machines in the United States, with 33,000 in use nationwide. In the November general elections, about 10 percent of registered voters will vote on one of these machines. And in the states of Maryland and Georgia, all voters will vote on the AccuVote-TS model.

The authors of the Princeton study present three key findings:

1. Malicious software running on a single voting machine can steal votes with little if any risk of detection. The malicious software can modify all of the records, audit logs, and counters kept by the voting machine, so that even careful forensic examination of these records will find nothing amiss. We have constructed demonstration software that carries out this vote-stealing attack.
2. Anyone who has physical access to a voting machine, or to a memory card that will later be inserted into a machine, can install said malicious software using a simple method that takes as little as one minute. In practice, poll workers and others often have unsupervised access to the machines.
3. AccuVote-TS machines are susceptible to voting-machine viruses—computer viruses that can spread malicious software automatically and invisibly from machine to machine during normal pre- and post-election activity. We have constructed a demonstration virus that spreads in this way, installing our demonstration vote-stealing program on every machine it infects. ... Once installed on a single “seed” machine,

the virus would spread to other machines, ... allowing an attacker with physical access to one machine (or [memory] card) to infect a potentially large population of machines. The virus could be programmed to install malicious software, such as a vote-stealing program or denial-of-service attack, on every machine it infected.

In other words, it would not take a “vast conspiracy” implementing “plans of inconceivable complexity” to steal the 2004 presidential election. It would only take a few Bush operatives in key states, with access to voting machines, who were armed with doctored memory cards and willing to break the law (with little chance of being caught, apparently).

**W**HAT MORE DO the skeptics want? We have an indication that something was amiss in the 2004 presidential election: a discrepancy between the exit polls and the official count that defies explanation. Now we have the means by which the election could have been stolen: the doctored memory card created by the Princeton researchers. But is that a smoking gun? If so, whose fingerprints are on that gun? Are the naysayers waiting for answers to these questions before endorsing a call for a wider investigation?

In an effort to spur decision makers into taking action, Freeman and I are collecting endorsements from respected academics and pundits. For example,

Jack H. Nagel, a professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania, provided us this quote:

After Steven Freeman first pointed to the statistical improbability of the discrepancy between 2004 Election Day exit polls, which forecast a Kerry victory, and the officially reported results, opinion leaders accepted with relief the *mea culpa* offered months later by exit pollsters Joe Lenski and Warren Mitofsky. The careful analyses presented in this book demonstrate that the pollsters’ explanation is utterly unsatisfactory. Indeed, the additional evidence that Freeman and Bleifuss develop is even more disquieting than the original discrepancy. Their book deserves to stimulate follow-up investigations into the threat to our democracy posed by insecure electronic voting machines, and into the possibility that their vulnerability was exploited in 2004 with fateful results. As a citizen, I very much hope that the answer is “no,” but it is time for mainstream scholars, journalists and public officials to stop avoiding the question.

Yet will such calls be enough? “Conspiracy theorist” is a powerful pejorative, a label no journalist wants to be tainted with. (See Doug Ireland’s review of *Kill the Messenger* on page 43.) After all, some conspiracy theorists are total nutters. Look no further than 9/11. (See Terry Allen’s “The 9/11 Faith Movement” in our June issue, a story that has garnered more than 1,300 reader comments on [www.in-thetimes.com](http://www.in-thetimes.com).)

But some conspiracy theories are legitimate. Take the 2000 presidential election. Clearly, state officials in Florida, where Jeb Bush was governor, conspired with state officials in Texas, where George W. Bush was governor, to purge thousand of African Americans from the voter rolls using fraudulent felon lists—and that’s only the beginning. Or, take the Iraq war. Clearly, the Bush administration and adjunct neocons conspired to deceive the American public about the threat posed by Iraq in order to invade the country.

Being tarred as a conspiracy theorist is not the only hurdle. That brings us to the final reason this story is not given credence. The idea of the 2004 Bush/Cheney campaign “winning” the presidential election through vote theft creates profound cognitive dissonance. Many people find the idea overwhelming, the implications scary, the consequences profound. For, if one accepts that Republican operatives stole the election, what will we do about it? ■



DAVID MCNEW/GETTY IMAGES

# Where the Seats Are

The upcoming election guarantees gains for the Democrats. They won't be coming from the South.

BY THOMAS F. SCHALLER

**P**OISED TO ASSUME THEIR respective posts atop new congressional Democratic majorities, Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) can be forgiven a certain giddiness as the 2006 midterm elections approach. Pelosi recently told *Time* that establishment Democrats in Washington "can't even believe the fact that I'm going to become Speaker, but they're getting used to it." A bit more cautious but no less hopeful, Reid has noted that "history's on [the] side" of the minority party in a president's second midterm cycle.

To become the first female House Speaker, Pelosi will need to gain 15 seats. For Reid to become Senate majority leader, Democrats must net six new senators. A year ago, talk of an electoral upheaval of this sort was limited to the perfunctory cheerleading of Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) and Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.), the men tasked with recruiting, training and electing Democrats to Congress.

Since then, however, the conventional wisdom has reversed. Most of the "political capital" President Bush claimed to have earned in his 2004 re-election was poured down the Iraqi money pit or squandered in a failed attempt to privatize Social Security. By August 2005, whatever political currency the Administration had left Hurricane Katrina promptly swept over the broken levees.

The pre-election consensus among political handicappers like Charlie Cook, Thomas Mann and Stu Rothenberg is that Democrats will flip the House, and have a decent shot of deadlocking the Senate and an outside chance of capturing it outright. To maintain control, even if narrowly, top Republicans are relying on district-by-district, state-by-state efforts as a local buffer against pervasive anti-Bush and anti-Republican sentiments nationally.

Whatever the magnitude of the coming changes, two things are certain: The Democrats are going to gain seats in the 2006 midterms, and those gains will come from outside the South.

## Regionalized partisanship rises

The 1920 elections were a Democratic disaster. Dissatisfaction with Woodrow Wilson created an electoral avalanche that would be nearly impossible in today's era of highly gerrymandered districts and overwhelming incumbent advantages. Republicans picked up 10 new senators and 62 representatives, giving the GOP 61 of 98 Senate seats and a whopping House majority with 302 seats. The resulting 67th Congress mirrored the regional alignment of the two parties, with no Republican senators and just a handful of House members coming from the 11 states of the former Confederacy. Despite their chokehold on the South, the Democrats were a regionally confined party that found little support elsewhere in the country.

It was an era in American politics when presidential and congressional results aligned regionally in ways that have been decidedly misaligned since the collapse of the New Deal in the late '60s.

But regionalized partisanship is beginning to emerge anew. Republicans won every southern state in the past two presidential elections and now have 18 of the region's 22 senators and two-thirds of its House seats. In 2004, despite Bush's two-and-a-half-point defeat of John Kerry, outside the South the Democrats actually *gained* congressional seats in both chambers. That's right: If the five House seats produced by the re-districting of Texas orchestrated by former majority leader Tom DeLay and the five Senate pickups made possible by those southern Democratic retirements are held aside, the Democrats won the 2004 congressional elections.

## Four-D Democrats

Today, the Democrats cannot swing enough seats in the near or medium term to invert the electoral maps of the late 19th and early 20th centuries—that is, to confine Republicans solely to their new, southern dominion. Nor would they want to: Democrats will never be shut out of the South the way Republicans once were

because there will always be a certain number of districts in the South where African Americans and Hispanics make up the majority. What Democrats can do, however, is accelerate the regional transformation already underway in the quadrant of the northeastern and midwestern states formed by connecting Dover, New Hampshire, and Dover, Delaware, to the east, with Des Moines, Iowa, and Duluth, Minnesota, to the west.

Call it the "Four-D Rectangle."

The Cook Political Report publishes a partisan index that measures the House district-level performance of presidential candidates. Rising partisanship has shrunk the number of split districts, that is, districts that vote for Democratic presidential candidates but have a Republican member of Congress, or vice versa. Republicans currently represent 59 districts that either tilt Democratic or which Bush won by narrow margins, and 44 of these seats are located in the Four-D Rectangle.

Consider Connecticut. Although the Nutmeg State has already drawn plenty of attention for its bloody, intra-party squabble between Ned Lamont and Joe Lieberman in the Senate race, it is Connecticut's House seats that are more indicative of the electoral situation. This blue presidential state has only five House seats, three of which are represented by the sort of moderate, "Rockefeller Republicans" who once formed the backbone of the GOP: Nancy Johnson, Chris Shays and Rob Simmons.

None of the three received at least 60 percent of the vote in 2004, and both Shays and Simmons are prime Democratic targets because they won with less than 55 percent. Defying the White House and his fellow Republicans, the embattled Shays made national headlines by calling for a timeline to withdraw American troops from Iraq. His defection was quickly deemed the Shays Rebellion.

Along with Connecticut, the Emanuelled Democrats are also eyeing winnable seats in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New York,



## YEAR OF THE DONKEY

Ohio and Pennsylvania. Democratic challengers are even causing Republican headaches in places like Idaho, eastern Washington, and Wyoming's at-large seat. By contrast, about half of the small group of Democratic incumbents in jeopardy of losing despite a general tailwind this cycle are southerners: Louisiana's Charlie Melancon, South Carolina's John Spratt and two Georgia Democrats.

### Schumer-freude

The Northeast and Midwest are also home to four of the five most vulnerable Republican senators running for re-election this cycle: Missouri's Jim Talent, Ohio's Mike DeWine, Pennsylvania's Rick Santorum and Rhode Island's Lincoln Chafee. The fifth is Montana's Conrad Burns.

None of the five targets are in the South, the region that produced five new Republicans in 2004 to fill the vacancies created by the simultaneous retirement of five Democratic senators. Current Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.) is a formidable campaigner who hopes to take the Senate seat being vacated by Majority Leader Bill Frist, and the "macaca" blunder of Sen. George Allen (R-Va.) has breathed new life into party-switcher Jim Webb's Virginia campaign.

But these two seats are considered second-tier opportunities.

Meanwhile, the Democrats' chances of picking up the sixth and decisive seat Schumer and Reid need for a majority are as good in the Southwest as the Southeast. In Arizona, well-financed millionaire Jim Pederson has an outside chance of up-ending two-term Republican incumbent Jon Kyl, who is a lackluster campaigner. And in Nevada, former President Jimmy Carter's son Jack is closing ground against rookie Republican John Ensign.

Even if Democrats come up short, netting just three or four seats this cycle, the Senate outlook is just as promising two years hence. The Democrats are defending 18 seats to just 15 for the Republicans in 2006, but in 2008 the split is 21 Republican seats to only 12 Democrats. If Reid fails to get his majority this time around, he'll be poised to do so next cycle.

The emergent pattern is clear: To forge a House majority, the Democrats will need to convert the purple Midwest states to blue, make the blue states of the Northeast bluer, and snag the odd seat here and there in the interior West. *The Washington Post's* Dan Balz and David Broder confirm that top Republican strategists, speaking off-the-record about their party's prospects, are predicting doom: "Republicans face potential losses in every section of the country, but the area that concerns strategists most is the arc of states running from the Northeast across the Midwest."

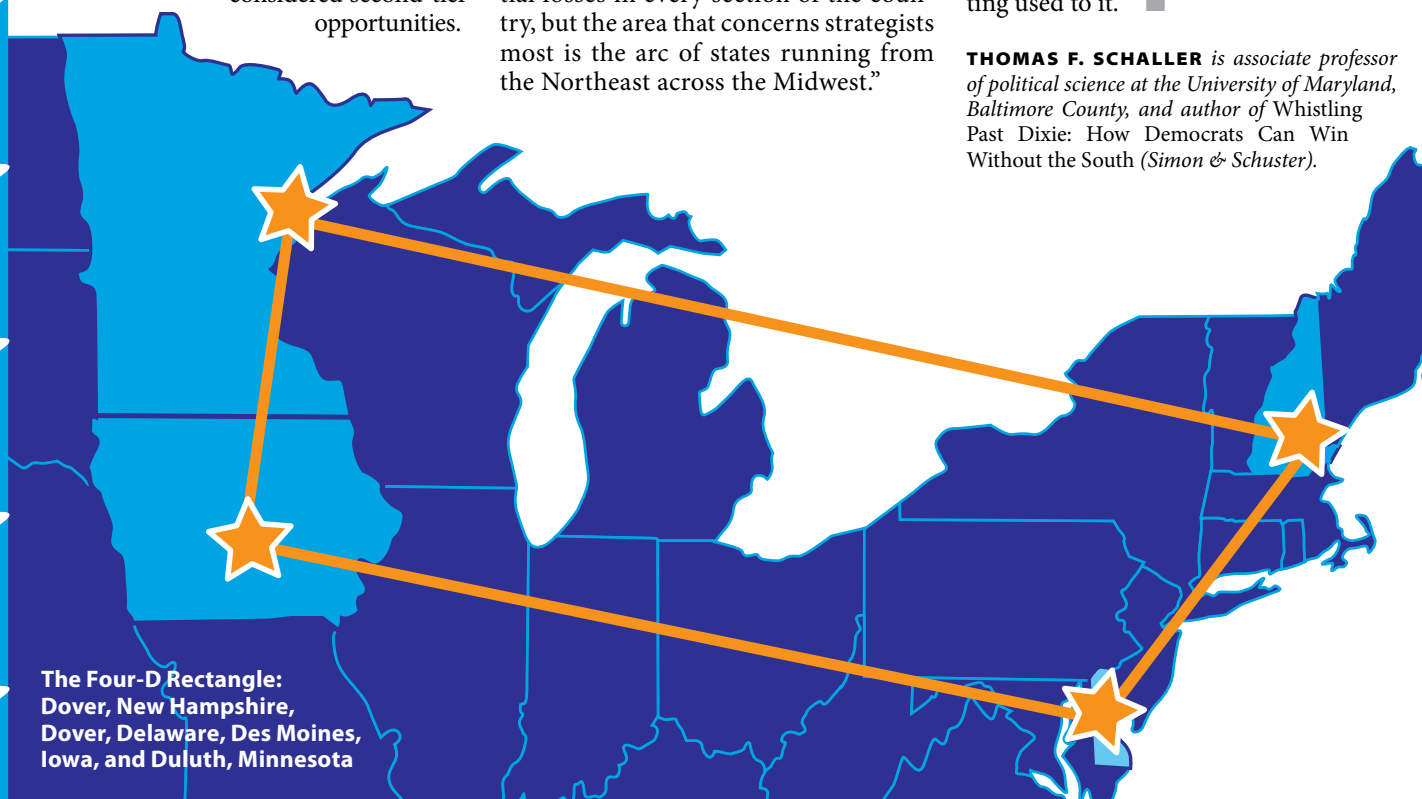
### Party correction

Evidence of this pattern can be found across the ballot. In January 2001, there wasn't a single Democratic governor in any of the eight states of the interior West; there are four now, and if 2006 Democratic nominees in Colorado and Nevada win it could rise to six. The Republicans are almost certain to lose the New York and Ohio governorships, and Democrats are also favored to win in Maryland and Massachusetts. In the 2004 state legislative elections, Democrats gained enough seats outside the South to more than compensate for their southern congressional losses, flipping control of eight chambers, only one of which was in the South.

Though Pelosi and Reid would never say so publicly, national Democrats are benefiting from a regional correction to the realignment that began with the South's Republican conversion following the *Brown v. Board* ruling and the civil rights movement. To accelerate this process, Democrats must expand and consolidate their control over the Northeast and Midwest by purging as many of the remaining "Rockefeller Republicans" as possible.

For many in the Democratic establishment in Washington, this is the new regional winning formula for the party. As Pelosi might say, they'd better start getting used to it. ■

**THOMAS F. SCHALLER** is associate professor of political science at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and author of *Whistling Past Dixie: How Democrats Can Win Without the South* (Simon & Schuster).



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# Dueling Democrats

No matter what happens election day, Democrats are in for a wild ride in 2007.

BY DAVID SIROTA

**I**N ITS WIDELY-CIRCULATED AUGUST profile of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, *Time* noted, "House Democrats have been more unified in their voting than at any other time in the past quarter-century, with members on average voting the party line 88 percent of the time in 2005." The numbers don't lie. But they do obscure a little-discussed truth: Divisions in the Democratic Party are sure to grow larger, whether the party wins or loses the mid-term elections.

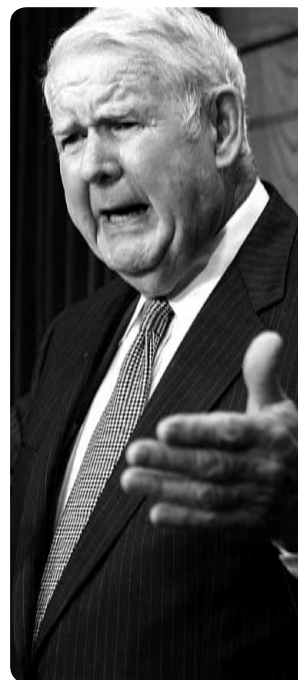
For the better part of 20 years, Democratic divisions have seethed under America's political surface, with only the rare contested presidential primary providing a release valve. Any number of self-defeating pathologies emanating from inside the Democratic Party have worked to raise the temperature: From President Bill Clinton's embrace of corporate-written trade deals that crushed the party's working-class base to congressional Democrats' complicity in the Iraq War and rejection of the growing anti-war movement, Democratic Party elites have gotten used to kicking the party base in the face.

The situation is ready to explode. What the late Paul Wellstone called the "Democratic wing of the Democratic Party" is growing feisty. And progressives are increasingly in a position to flex their muscles thanks to a convergence of factors: the rise of Internet fundraising, the ascendancy of blog and vlog (video blog) media and the crushing economic forces that are radicalizing previously apolitical middle-class constituencies. These developments have exposed the Democratic establishment to the same kind of pressure that conservative grassroots activists have exerted on the Republican Party to great electoral success.

Nowhere was this changing dynamic more on display than in Connecticut's



JUSTIN SULLIVAN/CHIP SOMODEVILLA/ MARK WILSON/GETTY IMAGES



**If the Democrats win the House in November, Nancy Pelosi will become speaker and Maryland's Steny Hoyer (center) and Pennsylvania's Jack Murtha could duke it out for the job of majority leader.**

recent Democratic senatorial primary and its aftermath. Businessman Ned Lamont—a first-time statewide candidate—toppled 18-year incumbent Sen. Joe Lieberman after running a campaign against Lieberman's support for the Iraq War, Social Security privatization and lobbyist-written trade deals that have decimated the Nutmeg State's manufacturing economy. Lamont was grossly outspent thanks to Lieberman's corporate-funded war chest, but he built a grassroots campaign by tapping into his party's newly energized voters.

In response, a frightened Democratic Party in Washington tried to pretend nothing happened. Like frustrated children covering their ears and yelling "I can't hear you!," Democratic senators welcomed Lieberman back to their

caucus after the summer recess—even though Lieberman announced he was abandoning his party to run in the general election against the Democratic nominee. Though many Democratic lawmakers officially endorsed Lamont, many also suggested to reporters they were still hoping for a Lieberman victory in the general election. That Lieberman ran to the media to berate his party, likened his opponent to a terrorist sympathizer and declared his refusal to endorse down-ballot Democrats in other races seemed of little interest to Democrats comfortably insulated in the Senate club.

But theirs is a false sense of comfort. Whether the Democrats win or lose on November 7, the party is in for a wild ride.



## If they win

When the hangover from election night clears, a Democratic-controlled Congress will face a giant faultline between its senior members and its rank-and-file. The chairmen of key committees are among the most progressive lawmakers in Congress. Further, these are senior legislators who have been waiting for a chance at the majority for years—not rookies who will take up their gavels with no ideas about what they want to do. And they will be bolstered by the emerging progressive technological and grassroots infrastructure that provided the keys to mid-term victory.

The hotspots will likely arise on the panels that oversee the most ideological issues and have the most progressive chairmen. In the House, that's the Ways and Means Committee (taxes and trade), the Energy and Commerce Committee (health care and energy), the Education and Workforce Committee (education and pensions) and the Judiciary Committee (civil liberties and potentially impeachment), expected to be headed by Democratic Reps. Charles Rangel (N.Y.), John Dingell (Mich.), George Miller (Calif.) and John Conyers (Mich.), respectively. In the Senate, that's the Armed Services Committee (Iraq) and the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (all of the above), expected to be chaired by Sens. Carl Levin (Mich.) and Ted Kennedy (Mass.), respectively.

What will happen, for instance, when Chairman Miller pushes through legislation that outlaws the most vicious of Corporate America's pension cutback schemes? Will people like Minority Whip Steny Hoyer (D-Md.)—who has bragged about starting his own K Street Project—lead the opposition? How about when Chairman Levin introduces a resolution demanding an exit strategy from Iraq? Will he face a battle not only with Republicans, but with Democrats backed by neoliberal, pro-war think tanks like the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)? And what about when the Bush administration sends down its next corporate-written trade deal? Will Democrats have the unity to defeat it? The answer is that progressives will certainly have a decent chance of enacting their agenda—but not without bruising fights within the Democratic caucus.

To be sure, important areas of unity exist on consensus issues like raising the minimum wage. And the non-ideological committees will be in a position to make significant, unimpeded progress. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees, respectively headed by Rep. Dave Obey (Wis.) and Sen. Robert Byrd (W.Va.), will have little trouble ripping up President Bush's draconian budgets and forcing him to either accept or veto substantial funding increases to health care and education programs. Similarly, a House Government Reform Committee headed by firebrand Rep. Henry Waxman (Calif.) will have the backing of every Democrat who wants to see the Bush administration investigated on a wide variety of non-ideological issues like war profiteering and corruption.

Nonetheless, a Democratic majority will not have the luxury of avoiding the issues that divide it. At a time of stagnating wages and a job outsourcing crisis, continuing to skirt the subject of globalization and international economic policy would likely result in the shortest-lived congressional majority in American history. And besides, a potentially growing faction of Democratic lawmakers will demand action one way or the other. If, for instance, Democratic Senate candi-

dates Jon Tester (Mont.), Sherrod Brown (Ohio), Bob Casey (Pa.), Bernie Sanders (Vt.) and Lamont are victorious, they will add to an existing bloc of senators that is already planning to demand reforms to America's trade policy.

In this fluid majority scenario, the progressive movement that exists outside the Democratic Party will be more important than it is now—but only if it serves as a progressive ideological force, and not simply a partisan one. If organizations like Moveon.org, unions and the consumer/environmental/civil rights advocacy groups are willing to prioritize their policy agendas over the Democratic Party insiders' desire simply to win the next election through expediency, the progressive movement will become a kingmaker that lawmakers will rely on for their survival and success. Say goodbye to the era of Democratic lawmakers laughing off the grassroots like they did after the Lamont primary victory, and say hello to Democratic lawmakers pleading for grassroots support.

But, again, getting to that point will require the progressive movement to be comfortable not just going up against Republicans, but going up against lawmakers of both parties who cross its agenda. And if recent trends are any indication, the progressive movement is more than

**If the Democrats fail to take the House in November, Illinois' Rahm Emanuel (shown here) could vie with Steny Hoyer for the job of minority leader.**



WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

ready to assume this role. The Lieberman primary as well as other lower-tier primaries against Reps. Jane Harman (D-Calif.) and Al Wynn (D-Md.) indicate that progressives are not about to allow a Democratic majority to become complacent. On the contrary—Democratic legislators could be scrutinized even more closely by progressives.

cal “experts” entitled “Embracing Our Inner Genghis: A Blueprint for Democratic Victory in 2008.”

But this time around, progressives won't have to take the distortions sitting down. With the party insisting on running its 2006 campaign without embracing the kind of bold economic, health care, anti-corruption and national security stances

tioned him to make a renewed case for his own promotion after a mid-term election loss. In short, his constant pecking at Pelosi is all about his being able to argue “I told you so” if Democrats lose—and then making a run against her for minority leader with the full backing of the Wall Street wing of the party. In all likelihood, this is the very scenario Hoyer privately

## At a time of stagnating wages and a job outsourcing crisis, continuing to skirt the subject of globalization and international economic policy would likely result in the shortest-lived congressional majority in American history.

### If they lose

If circular firing squad competitions were an Olympic sport, Democrats' typical post-election behavior would make them gold medal contenders. This is a party that has a lot of practice blaming each other—and in particular, a lot of experience watching the conservative, Big Money wing of the party dishonestly stereotype progressives as the reason for electoral defeat.

After the 2000 election, DLC chief Al From viciously attacked fellow DLCer Al Gore for supposedly being too populist (so much for loyalty). It didn't matter that after Gore's Democratic convention speech—arguably the most populist moment of his candidacy—he surged in the polls. What mattered to the Washington insiders was they could use his 2000 election loss as an excuse to publicly berate progressives.

If Democrats somehow manage to seize a mid-term loss from the jaws of victory in 2006, the DLC will undoubtedly again fabricate a storyline that blames it entirely on progressives. Somehow, we will be expected to believe that even though polls show a strong majority of Americans are angry with the Bush White House and want an exit strategy from Iraq, Democrats will have lost because they didn't outhawk Bush by pushing the war even more aggressively than him. The DLC will issue a glossy report titled something like “Democrats Lost Because They Refused to Embrace the Politics of Genghis Khan” and then publish an accompanying book of essays by the DLC's politi-

cal “experts” entitled “Embracing Our Inner Genghis: A Blueprint for Democratic Victory in 2008.”

But this time around, progressives won't have to take the distortions sitting down. With the party insisting on running its 2006 campaign without embracing the kind of bold economic, health care, anti-corruption and national security stances

the public wants, a very compelling case can be made that the party lost the election because it projected weakness and timidity. And unlike in the past, the case will be made in a forceful manner by a strengthened base that has become increasingly influential, thanks to its growing power as a fundraising and grassroots political resource.

All of this will play out not just in the C-SPAN symposiums that the DLC feeds on, but also in Congress, most acutely in the House. There, Pelosi has steadfastly represented the progressive wing of the party, using her platform as minority leader to push her caucus away from K Street's influence and towards a far more populist agenda. At every turn, however, she has been undermined by the likes of Hoyer. When she pushed Democrats to take a serious position on the Iraq War, Hoyer berated her efforts to the *Washington Post*. When she worked to distance the caucus from corporate lobbyists, Hoyer pitched himself in news stories as the Democrats' chief point of contact for the lobbying community. When she tried to stop the credit card industry-written bankruptcy bill, Hoyer refused to help and instead voted for the abomination. The list goes on.

Hoyer's behavior has been simultaneously ideological and tactical. The antithesis of a conviction politician, he is the quintessential backroom dealer—a lawmaker who in an earlier era would have had a snappy, all-too-friendly nickname among the smoky back room crowd. His political moves have clearly made Big Business happy, and they have also posi-

dreams of, because if Democrats win the House, he's going to have his hands full with Rep. Jack Murtha (D-Pa.) who has already announced his intention to run against Hoyer for Majority Leader.

Pelosi will certainly be on the ropes with a Hoyer challenge and a mid-term election loss. But will the progressive movement mobilize to preserve her status as leader? It's a safe bet that Hoyer, who is a polarizing figure inside the Democratic caucus, will not be allowed to waltz to the top unchallenged. That leaves either a surprise run for leader from one of the senior progressives like Miller or Obey, or more likely, an attempt by professional self-promoter Rep. Rahm Emanuel (Ill.). Either way, an unpredictable situation will ensue—one where the ideological poles of the party will each use leadership candidates as vehicles to express their aspirations.

It goes without saying that a Democratic victory in 2006 would be much better for progressives and the country as a whole. The fights and problems that will come with a win are the enviable troubles of political riches, rather than political poverty. But progressives must not be tricked by the usual Democratic Party propaganda that promises a utopia after the election. No matter what the outcome on November 7, a new fight begins on November 8. ■

**DAVID SIROTA** is the author of *Hostile Takeover: How Big Money and Corruption Conquered Our Government—And How We Can Take It Back*. He is a consultant for Ned Lamont's campaign for U.S. Senate, [www.nedlamont.com](http://www.nedlamont.com).

# Why Pakistan Gets a Nuclear Pass

The Bush administration's pragmatic policy toward Pakistan suggests its foreign policy is less ideological than imperial.

BY LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY

**W**HY WAIT?" ASKED WILLIAM Kristol in a July 24 *Weekly Standard* op-ed calling for a preemptive military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. "Does anyone think a nuclear Iran can be contained? That the current regime will negotiate in good faith? It would be easier to act sooner rather than later." By August, the usual array of neo-conservative pundits were chanting the "Why wait?" mantra, as their supporters within the administration, most notably Donald Rumsfeld, issued dire warnings against "appeasement."

Yet in the midst of saber-rattling, the Bush administration was quietly doing its own share of appeasing—in the literal, if not historical, sense. In late July, the Institute for Science and International Security issued a report revealing that Pakistan was building a heavy-water reactor capable of producing enough plutonium for 40 to 50 nuclear weapons a year. The response from Frederick Jones, a spokesman for the National Security Council, was surprisingly mild: "The reactor is expected to be substantially smaller and less capable than reported."

There also wasn't much hand-wringing on September 6 when Pakistan's military dictatorship announced a peace treaty with militants in North Waziristan, described by one analyst as al-Qaeda's "center of gravity." Vice President Cheney's response: to praise President Pervez Musharraf as "a man who has demonstrated great courage under very difficult political circumstances and has been a great ally for the United States."

**C**RITICS OF THE Bush foreign policy have accused the administration of undertaking a global crusade against radical Islam. Joseph Cirincione, senior vice president for national security and international policy



George W. Bush gestures as Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf looks on during a press conference following a meeting at the Presidential Palace in Islamabad on March 6, 2006.

at the Center for American Progress, told NPR on August 30 that the Bush administration lumps all groups together in terms of this "Islamic fundamentalist, Islamo-fascist mush. ... That al-Qaeda is Hamas is Iran is al-Qaeda is Syria. They're all one enemy and we have to fight them all. Nonsense!" Their response to this undifferentiated, all-pervasive peril, he says, is a hyper-aggressive policy of preemptive regime change, "what [journalist] Ron Suskind calls 'The one percent doctrine'—if there's a one percent chance that Iran could get the bomb, give it to a terrorist group who could deliver it to New York, shouldn't we overthrow the regime?"

Suskind's book, *The One Percent Doctrine*, takes its title from Vice President Dick Cheney's response in November 2001 to intelligence that revealed meetings between top-ranking Pakistani

nuclear experts and Osama bin Laden. At the end of the briefing, Cheney declared, "If there's a one percent chance that Pakistani scientists are helping al-Qaeda build or develop a nuclear weapon, we have to treat it as a certainty in terms of our response." The irony is that the exception to this doctrine is the very nation that inspired its creation.

In stark contrast to its Middle East policy, the Bush administration's strategy with Pakistan has prioritized pragmatism over ideology, preferred diplomatic persuasion to military aggression and, most strikingly, displayed a willingness to tolerate Islamic extremism that does not directly challenge its interests. Pakistan hints at both a different, realpolitik side to the Bush foreign policy and a disconnect between the administration's moral and ideological rhetoric and its underlying goals.



**I**N HIS 2002 State of the Union speech, President George W. Bush pointed to North Korea, Iran and Iraq as part of the now infamous axis of evil: "By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred."

His criteria for membership in this club of rogue states were clear: a dictatorship that possessed or aimed to acquire weapons of mass destruction with documented ties to Islamic terrorist groups. What Bush didn't mention was that he had already entered into a marriage of expedience with Pakistan, the one regime that fully met each of the three requirements (although he did profess his admiration for "the strong leadership of President Musharraf.")

Pakistan bears a striking resemblance to Iran, which Bush has described as a country held hostage by an "elite that is isolating and repressing its people, and denying them basic liberties and human rights." Like Iran, Pakistan is a regime that, in Bush's words, "sponsors terrorists and is actively working to expand its influence in its [neighboring] region." But unlike Iran, this sponsor of Islamic radicalism is already a bona fide nuclear power that has refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. What's more, Pakistan has shared its nuclear technology with almost every country on the administration's sworn enemies list: Libya, North Korea, and, yes, Iran.

Before its hasty switch of allegiances in the wake of 9/11, Musharraf's military dictatorship had been one of the Taliban regime's closest allies, and many top-ranking members of the Pakistani Army and the all-powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had close, long-standing connections to al-Qaeda, dating back to the heydays of the anti-Soviet mujaheddin resistance. In fact, al-Qaeda was founded at a 1988 meeting in Peshawar, Pakistan. As a former diplomat told Seymour Hersh in the November 5, 2001, *New Yorker*, "If you go through the officer list, almost all of the I.S.I. regulars would say, of the Taliban, 'They are my boys.'"

But the Bush administration needed Pakistan's assistance to wage the war against Afghanistan, a country it knew practically nothing about. The result: a 180-degree reversal in U.S. policy, which

in 1998, following Pakistan's nuclear test, had included economic sanctions and the withdrawal of aid. "The U.S.-Pakistan relationship was fundamentally transformed within a very short period of time under a large amount of pressure after September 11," says Council for Foreign Relations analyst Michael Levi.

## **In contrast to its Middle East policy, the Bush administration's strategy with Pakistan has preferred diplomacy to military aggression and displayed a willingness to tolerate Islamic extremism that doesn't threaten U.S. interests.**

**F**IVE YEARS AFTER the 9/11 attacks, the U.S.-Pakistan relationship remains unchanged, even as Pakistan continues to flunk the Bush administration's own sniff test. Far from moving toward democracy, Musharraf is positioning himself to hold yet another round of rigged elections next year in order to stay in power until 2012. And while he may be no Saddam Hussein, Amnesty International has documented a variety of human rights abuses, including the torture and extra-judicial executions of insurgents by the Pakistani army in the ongoing civil war in Baluchistan.

As for ongoing connections with Islamic extremism, unlike the Baathist regime in Iraq or Hosni Mubarak's dictatorship in Egypt, the Pakistani dictators have traditionally used Islamic ideology to secure their power, and Musharraf continues that tradition to this day. According to Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, author of *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*, "Gen. Musharraf and the military hierarchy are neither extremist nor remotely fundamentalist. But they have every intention of using the fundamentalists as political allies against national political parties who question the need for military rule."

In practice, this has meant not only encouraging militant jihadis to fight a proxy war against India in Kashmir, but also tolerating the pro-Taliban activities of the Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (JUI) in Baluchistan. "[The Taliban] have been able to set up a major logistics hub, training camps, carry out fundraising and have been free to recruit fighters

from madrassas and refugee camps," wrote Rashid in a June 2 BBC column. "Al-Qaeda has helped the Taliban reorganize and forge alliances with other Afghan and Central Asian rebel groups."

Though the Bush administration has leaned on Musharraf behind the scenes, it's heaped extravagant praise on him

in public, especially for his role in both foiling this summer's al-Qaeda plot to blow up planes using liquid explosives and in arresting the terrorists involved in the London subway bombings in 2005. Yet the arrests also point to a less appetizing reality that Pakistan remains, in the words of Rashid, "the global center for terrorism and for the remnants of al-Qaeda."

Hassan Abbas, author of *Pakistan's Drift Into Extremism* and a research fellow at Harvard University, says Musharraf has made an effort to crack down on terrorism in areas that don't directly undermine his political base, such as the military actions against al-Qaeda in Waziristan, and Pakistan has arrested some of al-Qaeda's prominent leaders, who "may not be number one or two, but certainly people who are up there in the hierarchy." But even these efforts are in jeopardy now that Musharraf has ended hostilities in Waziristan—largely to placate the all-powerful Pakistani army, which has lost 350 soldiers in this unpopular campaign—and given permission to foreign militants to remain there in return for a vague promise to end incursions into Afghanistan.

The Bush administration's greatest success thus far has come in the area of nonproliferation. Despite Musharraf's refusal to turn over A. Q. Khan—who was arrested two years ago for supplying nuclear materials and know-how to Libya, Iran and North Korea—analysts like Levi say that the United States has been "fairly successful" in securing the Pakistani nuclear program. But the details of the arrangement remain secret.

"I think the U.S.-Pakistan cooperation in nuclear related issues is much closer than what is publicly known—primarily due to the U.S. concerns about the safety of Pakistani nuclear assets," Abbas says. "This aspect is not discussed openly because [such] cooperation will be interpreted in Pakistan as compromising [their sovereignty]."

**I**N FACT, VERY little is transparent about the nature of the relationship between the United States and Pakistan, or the kind of agreements it entails. As Levi points out, most of what is publicly reported is based more on speculation than fact. The secrecy is both worrying and ironic given Bush's perspective on Iran: "A non-transparent society that is the world's premier state sponsor of terror cannot be allowed to possess the world's most dangerous weapons," he says.

More important, as Abbas argues, the Bush administration is investing heavily in a dictator who is increasingly unable to rein in the very extremists he needs to secure his political future. Not only have groups like the JUI and the jihadis in Kashmir become increasingly independent, but the regime no longer has control over critical regions such as Waziristan and Baluchistan. "This is a very dangerous strategy," Abbas says. "There is no doubt there is going to be blowback."

While the Bush White House's Pakistan policy is undoubtedly flawed, it is also strikingly out of character. An administration best known for its ideological rigidity has been surprisingly pragmatic and subtle in its dealings with Islamabad. The same George W. Bush who is unable to differentiate between Hamas or Hezbollah in the Middle East has been willing in Pakistan to narrowly define terrorism to exclude groups who do not directly threaten U.S. interests—even though many of them

have close links to al-Qaeda.

The Bush administration has also been far more willing to deal with the reality of Pakistan's nuclear bomb than Iran's desire to build one in the distant future. "Pakistan already has the bomb. You can't do anything about that," Levi says. "Once the horse has fled, there are a lot more useful things you can do other than shut the barn door."

**C**RITICS OF THE Bush administration's confrontation with Iran have often pointed to Pakistan as an example of its double standard. As Bill Maher told Larry King, "And could we at least have a debate on whether this is an impossibility, that Iran be allowed the nuclear weapon before we invade them? I mean, Pakistan is a Muslim country full of people who want to kill us. And they have a nuclear bomb. Somehow that's OK."

But to accuse George Bush of hypocrisy is to miss the significance of the distinction his administration makes between the two regions. Unlike its heavy-handed Middle East policy, the Bush strategy in South Asia is a tightrope act that balances competing foreign policy objectives: prevent Islamic extremists from gaining control of Pakistan and, more important, its nuclear arsenal; bolster India as a counter-force to Chinese power; and use U.S. influence with Pakistan as a bargaining chip with India.

This policy tells us that the administration is willing to use the kind of diplomatic engagement it pretends to disdain to further its goals, which—as U.S. concerns about India and China suggest—are not limited to battling terrorism. What's more, it suggests that the reasons for the Bush administration's military adventurism in the Middle East have little to do with a morally righteous crusade against Islamic terrorists.


In the September/October, 2002, issue of *Foreign Affairs*, John Ikenberry, the director of the Princeton Project on National Security, argued that those looking for the real motivation for the so-called "war on terror" should look to a 1992 "Defense Policy Guidance" draft penned by Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis Libby. In it, they laid out a "grand strategy" to promote and maintain U.S. global dominance based on military preemption, unilateralism and, most importantly, control of the Middle East: "In the Middle East and Southwest Asia, our overall objective is to remain the predominant outside power in the region and preserve U.S. and Western access to the region's oil."

As Michael Klare, author of *Blood and Oil*, told *Mother Jones*, in this "grand strategy," oil is important not so much as fuel but as the source of global power: "Control over the Persian Gulf translates into control over Europe, Japan and China. It's having our hand on the spigot."

Control over the Middle East in turn requires eliminating any regime hostile to the United States and its closest ally, Israel. Iran is the enemy not because it is led by Islamist supporters of terrorism with plans to develop a nuclear bomb, but because it is a significant regional power opposed to the Bush administration's plan to "restructure" the Middle East to suit its global ambitions. In contrast, not only has Pakistan allied itself entirely with the Bush administration's war on terror, but Musharraf is now moving toward reinstating diplomatic ties with Israel.

The Bush double standard reveals a foreign policy that is less ideological than imperial. In this, the administration is different from its predecessors only by degrees of its ambition and ruthlessness. As Cirincione reminded NPR listeners, "The Shah wanted to build 20 nuclear reactors—that's what the government says they want to build now—we OK'd it. In fact, we wanted to sell them those reactors. Even when the CIA discovered in the '70s that the Shah was secretly working on a nuclear program, we still OK'd Iran's plans then to open a uranium enrichment facility and a plutonium reprocessing facility. We still went ahead because we said 'It's OK because he's our guy.'"

If the Bush administration succeeds in its outlandish plans for "regime change" in Iran, it may well be every bit as lenient with our new guy in Tehran. Just ask Pervez Musharraf. ■



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# Is Diversity Enough?

Walter Benn Michaels asks us to consider the harm done when we worry about identity and forget about inequality.

BY DAVID MOBERG

**T**HE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS at Chicago, a struggling but ambitious public university in the heart of the city, celebrates its ethnically diverse student body as a great achievement. But Walter Benn Michaels, chairman of the university's English department, is unimpressed. The commitment of universities, corporations and other institutions to such diversity is "at best a distraction and at worst an essentially reactionary position," he argues in his new book, *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*.

Right-wing academics and pundits have built careers taking potshots at affirmative action, multiculturalism and identity politics—pursuits that some postmodern leftists see as the heart of radical politics. Michaels criticizes diversity politics from the left. His argument represents a fundamental and constructive challenge to conventional thinking about the most important issues facing our society. But it is also easily misunderstood.

"I've been called a liberal racist more often than anything else in my life," he says, sitting in his office at the university's

one towering office building, stylishly dressed in black jeans and t-shirt under a black window-pane jacket.

He argues that the pursuit of diversity is based on a flawed understanding of humanity and stands as a roadblock to confrontation with the most basic injustices in society: "The trouble with diversity ... is not just that it won't solve the problem of economic inequality; it's that it makes it hard for us to even see the problem."

Race, as virtually all modern anthropologists and geneticists agree, is not a scientifically valid concept. Obvious physical differences exist among humans, but the genetic variation within conventionally defined races is often greater than the variation among those races. Still, "race" is a concept that people use all the time with profound consequences, even if they can't define it.

Race gets defined in ways that vary by time, geography and situation. Why, except for the peculiar American notion of blackness as being determined by one drop of "blood" of African ancestry, would a person of half African and half European genetic heritage, like Sen. Barack Obama, be called "black" rather

than "white"—the latter a supposedly racial category that has grown more inclusive over many years?

People may talk instead about belonging to different ethnic cultures, borrowing the notion that anthropologists developed to describe the shared symbols and understanding of a distinct group of people, like the Navajo or Mbuti. But as valuable, if elusive, as this idea may be in studying tribal societies, Michaels contends that in our society it is another way to create biological categories that don't exist and thereby perpetuate an inaccurate and racist view of the world. In his zeal, however, Michaels unnecessarily jettisons entirely, rather than reformulates, the notion of culture.

As Michaels sees it, the social focus on achieving diversity diverts attention from the most fundamental injustice in our society—economic inequality. Moreover, the pursuit of diversity, especially in universities, gives legitimacy to the growing economic inequality of American society, because it protects the inheritance of economic privilege and does little to create opportunity for the poor, whether black or white.





JULIE JAISINGER

Walter Benn Michaels

**M**ICHAELS, AUTHOR OF *Our America* and a writer about both literary theory and American literature, became interested in contemporary ideas of race and identity when studying American novels of the '20s. During that era, many public figures argued for the supremacy of what was seen as America's Anglo-Saxon or Nordic character. But by the '80s, Michaels notes, it was no longer publicly acceptable to advocate racial supremacy.

Today, at a time when liberals and conservatives alike profess to abhor racism and prejudice, a new free-market fundamentalism—dubbed neo-liberalism—also claims that racism inefficiently interferes with the workings of a free labor market.

"The question is," Michaels says, "once we've given up the racism, and once we've given up to some degree the idea that races are a biological reality, why are we so attached to races? The first answer is that American society as a whole loves race. What I mean by that is that generally both right and left are—in neo-liberal terms—conservatives. The fundamental precepts of neoliberalism—the sense that in American society, effort and hard work are rewarded, that there's a rough justice in the distribution of wealth, and that inherited inequality is not a fundamental problem—are widely held views in American

**Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Equality*, Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 256 pages, \$23.**

society. The two sets of ideas go together because one supports the other.

"The vision that the primary problems of America are intolerance—sexism, racism—is completely compatible with the view that if we could just get rid of that intolerance and hatred and fear of the other, we'd be living in a fundamentally just society."

That has not happened. Economic inequality, increasing for decades, has accelerated in recent years. As a new edition of the Economic Policy Institute's *The State of Working America* points out, productivity has grown for the past four years but the median American family income has fallen. According to recent Commerce Department figures, wages and salaries (which include soaring executive paychecks) took the smallest share of national income since records started in 1929, and corporate profits took the largest share since 1950.

Blacks still fare worse on average than whites, but Michaels argues that the central problem here is exploitation of workers, not discrimination against blacks. And diversity is not the solution. He writes, "If you're worried about the growing economic inequality in American life, if you suspect that there may be something unjust as well as unpleasant in the spectacle of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, no cause is less worth supporting, no battle is less worth fighting than the ones we fight for diversity."

The obligation of diversity is to be nice to each other, Michaels writes, but the obligation of equality is to give up some money. Given the choice, diversity has the advantage of appearing to be morally righteous while at the same time preserving economic self-interest.

**T**HE NOTION OF diversity took off after 1978 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Bakke v. Board of Regents* that the University of California could, as part of its legitimate interest in maintaining a diverse student body, take race into account when admitting students. According to Michaels, the response to the decision fostered the idea that universities should encourage students to appreciate the differences among races (or other identities more or less modeled on race). But it did not address the issue of economic inequality, which retards achievement for blacks proportionally more than for whites.

Economic inequality makes it harder for poor (including poor black) students to be able to afford to go to college. What's more, inequality—in education or family social capital—also makes it harder for poor students, once they reach college age, to compete academically with students from affluent families.

Michaels asserts that diversity gives legitimacy to higher education as a supposed meritocracy, which is important in an era when everyone is told that a college education is the key to success. Admitting a diverse student body, especially for the most elite schools, helps to create the impression that upper middle-class and rich students have won this educational ticket to higher incomes fairly, not because they come from families that are well off.

"The problem with affirmative action is not (as is often said) that it violates the principles of meritocracy," he writes; "the problem is that it produces the illusion that we actually have a meritocracy. ... Race-based affirmative action ... is a kind of collective bribe rich people pay themselves for ignoring economic inequality." If class-based affirmative action replaced racial affirmative action at Harvard, and its student body reflected the country's income distribution, he calculates that more than half the students would be gone, most of them rich and white.

"Universities are important not just because they pass on privilege," he elaborates in our interview, "but because they legitimate passing on privilege. Every white kid on campus can feel better when there are black kids and Asian kids on campus and not look around and see who's not there, which is poor kids."

Summing up his view of the contemporary American dilemma, he writes, "We love race—we love identity—because we don't love class." But the problem isn't "classism," or prejudice against poor or working class individuals, a concept modeled on racial identity. The problem is inequality, or lack of money. The solution, then, is economic equality, not diversity. We shouldn't celebrate a difference that should be instead overcome.

Michael argues that the moral goal for society—but especially for those on the left—should be justice, not respect for identity. Indeed, he is skeptical about the value or validity of almost all attempts at

establishing a historical or ethnic identity (though he says he has no objection to people seeking group identities, such as his identity as a White Sox fan).

He does approve of people sorting themselves into groups based on their beliefs. Such groupings can't be safely appreciated for their diversity. Instead they clash in the quest for truth (or at least dominance for their beliefs). But religious beliefs, or identities, are often inherited much like ethnic identities. And despite his own rationalist penchant for groups supporting clashing ideas, he underestimates the emotional needs most people have for a sense of personal history and for a feeling of community—even if they have to make up their stories and create cultures for themselves.

**F**OR THE LEFT, the most important groups have traditionally been social classes, and leftist analysts have long debated how to overcome the division of the working class over race and ethnic identities. Michaels adds a new twist to that debate, showing how the embrace of these differences obscures the issue of inequality and gives it legitimacy.

Michaels often argues as if commitment to racial diversity were the only obstacle to overcoming equality. When pressed, he says, "I completely agree it's not the only thing that distracts people from inequality. [Nonetheless] it's a very central factor, because there's nothing deeper in the American self than the set of stories that are based around race: 'We're two nations—black and white.' It's foundational scripture."

Would Americans view society as economically unfair if there was less focus on diversity? Might they not continue to think, as Michaels says they do now, that the highly unequal rewards from a neo-liberal market are just?

Many leftists have long thought that if racial, ethnic and other conflicts among workers were reduced, they would more readily recognize their self-interest and act against inequality.

But Michaels thinks that people are—or should be—motivated by a sense of justice, not self-interest. "It's naive to think you reduce people's beliefs to a question of their interests," he says. Yet it is equally naive to think that interests do not—or should not—play a major role in politics.

Whether they act in their own self interest or on their beliefs (or a combination of both), people also need both a sense of hope and the belief that they have the power to change their world. Historically, the left has seen a united working class as providing the power to overcome inequality. But for all of his valuable attention to economic inequality, Michaels does not address the

tunity for all children, Michaels would at the least abolish private schools, improve and equalize public school funding, and provide universal health care. But in order to have meaningful equality of opportunity, economic inequality among families must also be reduced—something he does not advocate. After all, education research consistently shows that school performance

## **As Michaels sees it, the social focus on achieving diversity diverts attention from the most fundamental injustice in our society—economic inequality.**

inequality of political power. And he pointedly observes that he is interested in inequality, not class.

"The goal is not to insist that class identification matters and racial identification doesn't matter," he said. "The crucial question I'm interested in is what's right and just, and that doesn't matter whether you belong to the upper middle class or working class but what you think is just and right. My commitment has never been to thinking about class. It's been on the importance of minimizing economic inequality and the irrelevance of race to that question."

But racism itself is still relevant, both the legacy effects and current practice outside of institutions like universities, making it politically unwise to drop all race-based policies before dealing with economic inequality. Indeed, Michaels is even somewhat sympathetic to reparations, which could provide money, not just apologies.

**T**O MINIMIZE ECONOMIC inequality, Michaels advocates equality of opportunity, not greater equality of income and living conditions. "You want to say that people should not be poor unless they somehow deserve their poverty," he argued. "Black people don't deserve their poverty because of the history of slavery, but no child deserves his or her poverty at all. We should at least guarantee that every child has equality of opportunity. Children become an important linchpin because children are the way in which inequality is transmitted."

In order to provide equality of oppor-

ty is closely linked to the economic status of students' families.

Michaels' commitment to a political strategy based on equality of opportunity suffers from another shortcoming. "Only if everybody has a chance to get rich can the people who don't get rich, the people who stay poor, be said to deserve their poverty," he writes. "And only if everybody has a chance to get rich can the people who do succeed be said to deserve their wealth." But, the market system values work in highly unequal and unfair ways and puts some people (like stockbrokers and CEOs) structurally in a position to capture more of the wealth others create. In any case, far more than skill or hard work determines financial success—from dumb luck to making choices that may be socially valuable but not highly valued in the market, for example.

Further, the equality of opportunity that Michaels advocates would also leave intact and legitimate the neoliberal system of inequality. Equality of opportunity might reduce the likelihood that each generation would end up where their parents were, but society would still be growing more economically unequal.

That said, Michaels deserve plaudits for putting economic inequality back in the center of political debate, where it should be not only for the left but for all America. He deserves similar praise for arguing in a creative, if discomfiting, way about how flawed thinking about race continues to work in new ways to reinforce an exploitative and increasingly unequal economic system. ■



As expanding deserts have encroached on Dunhuang, the city has created a 'sand park' where people ride camels and sleigh down dunes.

# China's Growing Desert

## Overgrazing is stripping arable lands, creating the potential for ecological refugees.

BY JEHANGIR S. POCHA

**B**EIJING—A NEW CHINESE EXPORT has been spreading quietly across Asia and the United States: dust.

Violent sandstorms from China's expanding deserts have been battering numerous Chinese cities, and now their mustard-colored dust has begun reaching South Korea, Japan and the west coast of North America.

"People dusting off their cars in California or Calgary often don't realize the sand has come all the way from China," says Lester Brown, president of the Earth Policy Institute (EPI) in Washington D.C., who was in Beijing recently. "There is a dustbowl developing in China that represents the largest conversion of productive land to desert of any place in the world ... and it's affecting the world."

China has always suffered from aridity, as about 20 percent of its landmass is comprised of deserts made famous in tales about the Silk Road that traversed many of them.

But the situation is getting worse. Persistent drought, overgrazing, indiscriminate use of ground water and rampant logging are eroding the edges of China's deserts, allowing them to merge and spread. Recent satellite imagery shows that the Badain Jaran desert in north-central China is pushing southward toward the nearby Tengger desert to form a single, larger desert, overlapping both northwestern Gansu province and neighboring Inner Mongolia.

Expanding deserts swallow almost a million acres of land every year, China's State Environmental Protection Administration says. Soon 40 percent of China could turn into scrubland, creating massive social, economic and ecological challenges, including the problem of millions of "ecological refugees."

"When I was a kid, the desert was five kilometers [three miles] away but now it's right here," says Li Liang, 19, gesturing to the sand now lining the periphery of his family's cotton farm just outside

Dunhuang in Gansu. "Every year there are sandstorms, and every time there is a sandstorm our cotton is destroyed and we have to replant it, which costs a lot."

**I**RONICALLY, THE LI family's diminishing profits are rooted in China's increasing prosperity. The leading cause of China's desertification is the growing number of sheep and goats being reared in places such as Gansu for China's increasingly prosperous 1.3 billion people who are eating more and more meat.

China now has 400 million cattle, sheep, goats and yaks, up from 100 million in 1960. Most of these animals are owned by traditional herders who graze them on ecologically fragile hills and steppes, so the animals have uprooted and eaten up vast swathes of grassland. As the topsoil has loosened, strong winds have blown it away, creating massive sandstorms and turning the area into desert.

According to official reports, about 4,000 villages across China have recently been swallowed by the encroaching desert and more than 200 million people are suffering from the effects of desertification.

Significantly, it's not just tiny hamlets like Li's that are being threatened. The legendary Gobi desert in central China has expanded by about 25,000 square miles since 1994 and its sands are now within 100 miles of Beijing.

The capital gets blasted by about half a million tons of sand every year, often reducing visibility to the point where even its soaring skyscrapers are barely visible, air traffic stops and people are forced to stay indoors.

Curiously, while such sandstorms seriously impact human health by causing and exacerbating various skin, breathing and eye disorders, they can be quite good for the earth. Often, the minerals transported during sandstorms provide new nutrients to inland ecosystems and the seas, according to the Asian-Pacific Regional Aerosol Characterization Experiment, an international campaign focused on understanding how dust particles affect the chemistry of the atmosphere.

The organization's researchers say they also want to study how dust changes the quantity of solar energy our planet radiates back into space, something that will enhance our understanding of climate change.

But that's cold comfort for Yang Jian, director of the Development Planning De-



partment in the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture, who is worried about how China's desertification will impact food supplies.

Yang says China needs up to 500 million tons of grain every year. While the country is currently self-sufficient in food, production is slipping. The biggest reason for the decline is that about a million acres of arable land have been lost to urban sprawl over the last decade, according to official reports. Though Yang's ministry has reserved 255 million acres of land for agriculture, much of it is in areas affected by desertification.

If the desert eats substantially into China's arable land, Beijing will be forced to import grains. This would raise world food prices, a potentially life-threatening shift for the world's 350 million poor who live on less than \$1 a day, Yang says.

**W**ITH OFFICIAL REPORTS also warning that China is losing about \$7.7 billion a year because of desertification, the government is trying hard to battle the creeping sands.

Farmer Li says local officials ordered his family to switch from growing cotton to planting trees in the hope that reforestation of the desert's periphery will help contain it. Many counties in Gansu have also restricted herders from grazing their animals on damaged grasslands, and cities such as Beijing are creating "shelter-belts" of grass and trees around themselves.

China is even trying to water arid regions by seeding clouds with silver iodide, which creates "artificial" rain. The chemical, which is sprayed into clouds by plane or cannon shell, cools clouds so their moisture condenses and falls as rain.

So far, the Chinese government has equipped about 35,000 farmers with antique anti-aircraft guns and trained them to fire shells loaded with silver iodide into passing clouds.

But according to Gao Jixi, director of the Institute of Environmental Ecology in Beijing, which studies desertification, even the most innovative measures will not roll back the desert if China's GDP-growth oriented policies continue to ignore environmental costs.

"It is more important we respect nature's rules by restoring the original ecological systems in those regions," Gao says.

But that seems far off: Chinese authoritarian leaders cannot afford to promote any policy that may slow its economy.

"Chinese leaders have a legitimacy problem," says Jing Huang, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C. "Their only tools for staying in power are nationalism and economic growth."

Growth is particularly important in Gansu, Inner Mongolia and other poor western provinces such as Xinjiang and Tibet, which have substantial minority

these two parched swathes of sand are merging just like the Badain Jaran and Tengger deserts in Gansu.

The new proximity of the desert to urban centers such as Dunhuang and Beijing has prompted some local entrepreneurs to create "sand parks" where city kids can ride camels, toboggan down dunes and drive SUVs. But charging people so that

## About 4,000 villages across China have recently been swallowed by the encroaching desert and more than 200 million people are suffering the effects of desertification.

populations. Conscious of how disliked the Communist Party is in these areas, Beijing is trying to win over hearts and minds by delivering economic development.

But the mega public works projects being built in these areas, such as the new 1,300-mile-long railway linking Beijing to Tibet, often take a massive environmental toll.

In Xinjiang, where Muslim Uighurs have launched an armed insurgency to demand independence, Beijing's attempts to increase irrigation are backfiring. The province's Tarim River has dried up, and the large poplar groves around it that once served as a barrier between two deserts, the Taklamakan and the Kumtag deserts, are disappearing. As a result,

they can frolic in sand that is literally smothering Chinese villages—and even spreading across the Pacific Ocean—is emblematic of the benign disinterest that overlooks the long-term environmental costs of short-term profits.

The EPI's Brown says that China is the country that best exemplifies this global problem. Such unbalanced development, he warns, is threatening to spawn catastrophes that could destabilize the entire world.

"Communism [in China and elsewhere] collapsed because it did not calculate the full economic costs of products," he says. "Now capitalism will collapse if it does not calculate the full environmental costs of things." ■



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# Halliburton ♥ Congress

**Do partisanship and cronyism trump congressional oversight and corporate accountability?**

BY FRIDA BERRIGAN

**F**ECES IN THE SOLDIERS' water. Blood on the mess hall floor. Expired and substandard food. \$85,000 trucks with flat tires abandoned in the desert. Embroidered towels for twice the cost. More than \$1 billion in "questionable charges."

These are just a few of the allegations levied against Halliburton, and its subsidiary Kellogg Brown and Root (KBR), by former employees, soldiers and their families as well as Pentagon and congressional investigators. Since the beginning of the war in Iraq, Halliburton has been working for the Pentagon under the Logistics Civil Augmentation Program (LOGCAP)—a multi-billion dollar agreement that guarantees the contractor receives a fixed profit based on the quote the company gives for tasks like food service, provisioning and outfitting of U.S. soldiers. Last year alone, Halliburton brought in \$5.4 billion for its work in Iraq.

In July, the Army announced it was discontinuing the controversial contract and will re-open bidding on a new logistics contract to be split between four companies, one of which will perform oversight functions. Despite its track record, Halliburton is free to make a bid.

In addition to its lucrative military logistical work, Halliburton recently checked off their \$2.41 billion "Restore Iraqi Oil" contract as complete—even though gas is \$3.20 per gallon in Baghdad and the oil infrastructure remains in shambles. Among its other contracts, Halliburton is also working on a \$30 million project to build more prisons at Guantánamo.

## Checks and balances

With billions of dollars at stake and the war prospectively stretching into the next decade, why isn't Congress banging the gavel on oversight and corporate accountability? And why have congressional Democrats been forced to resort to guerilla tactics to wring information from Halliburton and other companies?



Sen. Byron Dorgan, the North Dakota chairman of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee, is tirelessly pushing for a Truman-style commission on war profiteering, but his amendments have been repeatedly defeated in party line votes—mostly recently in June with a 52-44 vote. As Dorgan spokesman Barry Piatt explains, "There is one-party control. Republicans hold the White House and the House and Senate and they are not interested in embarrassing each other." But, Piatt insists, "We aren't either. We're interested in getting the troops what they need, and in safeguarding the taxpayers' money."

The Truman Commission, created during World War II and credited with saving taxpayers \$15 billion (\$200 billion today), is a good model. Hoping to undercut the rank partisanship surrounding congressional investigation of

war profiteering, Missouri Democratic Senator Harry Truman began his investigations while a Democrat—Franklin Delano Roosevelt—was President.

In the service of this project, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee has been churning out reports like "The Failed Republican Strategy in Iraq Has Made Us Less Safe at Home." In the House, Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) is running a watchdog cottage industry out of his office—enlisting lawyers, investigators and technical experts to issue reams of reports like "Dollars, Not Sense: Government Contracting Under the Bush Administration." In both houses, Democrats are holding hearings with whistleblowers, former employees and analysts. These events generate news attention and outrage, but—thus far—not legislation or change.

## Shtick or substance?

Republicans sneer at these outsider efforts. "It gets to a point where it's more shtick than substance," says Kevin Madden, spokesman for House Majority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio). Rep. Tom David (R-Va.), chair of the Government Reform Committee, defends Republican inaction by declaring, "We aren't going after the mini scandal du jour trying to embarrass the administration at a hearing that's going nowhere."

Yet, during the Clinton years, Republicans seemed to love "nowhere" investigations. Did President Clinton sell Arlington cemetery plots to his big donors? Did he misuse the White House Christmas card list to hunt for potential contributors? The answers to these and many other questions were sought in aggressive and voluminous investigations by the Republican-controlled Congress. In all, between 1997 and 2002, the Government Reform Committee issued 1,052 subpoenas against the Clinton administration and the DNC and only 11 related to Republican abuse.

In contrast, during the 108th Congress, the Government Reform Committee grudgingly held four hearings on Iraq reconstruction contracting. Their final report dismissed critical witnesses as "so-called whistle blowers" and attributed multi-million dollar bumbles to the "fog of war." In Sen. Dorgan's view, the hearings "were called in order to defend Halliburton, which is a pretty pathetic way to do investigative oversight."

Frank Silbey, a former investigator for the Senate Labor Committee under both the Republicans and the Democrats, says he's never seen it so bad. "Congress has enormous power and it does nothing."

In March, the House had a chance to do something when Waxman attached Amendment 746 to the \$70 billion plus emergency war and reconstruction package. The amendment prohibited future contracts with companies that had overcharged the government by \$100 million or more. Even though Halliburton is the only company with such a dubious distinction, only 11 Republicans voted for the measure. House Armed Services Chair Duncan Hunter went so far as to praise the company for its "good, hard-working people" and to claim that he and other House leaders did not know why Waxman wanted hearings on Halliburton's track record in Iraq.

## Cozying up to Congress

Why doesn't Congress do more? Part of the answer lies in the political weight Halliburton throws around Washington, doling out hundreds of thousands in campaign contributions and accumulating more than \$1 million in lobbying bills in the past few years. Since 2000, the company has contributed more than \$645,000 to congressional campaign cof-

fers, with more than 90 percent going to Republicans. Their lobbying expenditures are also sky-high. After spending more than \$1 million on the services of firms like Baker Botts LLP (as in Bush Senior's Secretary of State James Baker III) and Vinson & Elkins in 2004, Halliburton spent another \$372,000 in 2005.

Vice President Dick Cheney's relationship to the company is widely known: Despite almost no corporate experience, Cheney was hired to head the oil services company in 1995, just a few years after completing his tenure as Secretary of Defense under President George H.W. Bush. When Cheney took the helm, the company was 73rd on the list of the Pentagon's top contractors, bringing in about \$1 billion in defense contracts a year. In part because of the contacts Cheney brought to the company, Halliburton now stands at number 6, with \$5.8 billion in Pentagon contracts in 2005.

Cheney is a great friend to have, but it doesn't hurt that the company has other close ties. Richard "Plame-gate" Armitage did freelance consulting work for Halliburton before assuming the number two position at the State Department. In 2005, KBR hired Joe Allbaugh, an aide to George W. Bush when he was governor of Texas and former director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, as a consultant. For good measure, they hired Allbaugh's wife Diane too.

Nonetheless, the idea of a Truman-style investigation into war profiteering is catching on and gaining traction.

MoveOn, the progressive lobbying and

education organization, has made political hay of Republican advocacy for corporations with a series of "Caught Red Handed" advertisements. One television ad highlights Halliburton's donations to Rep. Thelma Drake (R-Va.) alongside information about her vote against Waxman's March amendment that would have barred the company from further Pentagon contracts.

**When Cheney took the helm at Halliburton it was 73rd on the list of the Pentagon's top contractors. In part because of the contacts Cheney brought to Halliburton, it now stands at number 6, with \$5.8 billion in Pentagon contracts in 2005.**

Congress' role as corporate watchdog might have a better chance in the 110th Congress with Democratic candidates like Tammy Duckworth and Jim Webb campaigning on a platform of corporate accountability. Duckworth, a disabled Iraq war veteran, wants to fill the House seat vacated by the retiring Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.). The Black Hawk helicopter pilot lost both her legs in a November 2004 grenade attack. As a soldier in Iraq, Duckworth saw "numerous examples of questionable spending on military operations and reconstruction projects at the same time that our troops were facing shortages in the field." Cooks in her National Guard unit were replaced by KBR employees paid \$10 a day while the company charged the government \$22 a meal.

Along with Jim Webb, a former Secretary of the Navy running for the Virginia Senate seat against the incumbent Republican, George "Macaca" Allen, Duckworth has pledged to "introduce legislation to establish a special committee to investigate the billions of dollars being spent on military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan" if elected.

If Congress can't put aside partisanship, cronyism and greed to curb the most flagrant, egregious and criminal war profiteering behavior from companies like Halliburton, it will have a very hard time cracking down on smaller but no less troubling companies like Blackwater or DynCorp. Maybe it is time for a people's Truman Commission—start with the companies, and then look at Congress. ■



BY AARON SARVER

## Tracking the CIA Torture Flights

**On September 6, President George W. Bush admitted that the United States detains suspected terrorists in secret CIA-run prisons in foreign countries. He announced that 14 individuals previously held in these secret jails had been transferred to the “detention facility”**

on Guantánamo Bay Naval Base. The president claimed that no other individuals were currently being held at these CIA “black sites,” but refused to disclose the location of said jails. “Doing so would provide our enemies with information they could use to take retribution against our allies and harm our country.”

In their new book *Torture Taxi: On the Trail of the CIA’s Rendition Flights*, A.C. Thompson and Trevor Paglen detail how the CIA transports these “detainees” around the globe. Thompson, a staff writer at the *SF Weekly*, is the winner of a 2005 George Polk award for local reporting. Paglen, author of *Secret Bases, Secret Wars*, is an expert on clandestine military installations like Area 51, a military black site in Nevada that he has monitored with “telephotography” and “amateur geospatial intelligence.” *In These Times* spoke with Thompson about how they tracked planes going to and from locations that don’t officially exist.

**What first led you to investigate this story?**

My coauthor Trevor asked me, “I’ve been following these planes, figuring out how they transport people around the world. Can you help me figure out who owns these planes, where they are at and whether they are legitimate companies or not?”

We started getting into high-end online databases, pulling government records on the companies that he had identified with the CIA torture planes.

Next thing I knew, we were on the road to Reno, Nevada, to check out one of these companies. It quickly became clear that none of the companies were real. If we looked at three years of a company’s records, each year the signature of the CEO would look dramatically different. You start saying, “Wow! That’s not normal, that’s not normal at all.” We would look for the homes and phone numbers of the CEOs and find they did not show up anywhere. We couldn’t find any proof that the executives of these companies existed. It became clear that these were CIA fronts, not legitimate companies.

**Besides the paper trails you followed, what else was involved in piecing together the story?**

We realized through our research that a lot of these planes were flying out of a pair of airfields in rural North Carolina, so we flew to the towns and started poking around and talking to people. We tracked down the pilots who actually fly the planes. Most of them did not want to talk to us, which wasn’t surprising, but one did.

He told us about this company, called Aero Contractors that operates out of Johnston County, N.C., that was set up by a former CIA guy with the help of the agency. It transports CIA agents around the world and helps them conduct operations.

I was surprised to learn that the detainees are entirely transported on civilian charter planes. Can you explain the system under which these detainees are

shipped around the globe?

People think that an intelligence agency is going to operate in complete and utter secrecy, but that is not necessarily the case. The CIA is a civilian operation, and if you are a civilian operation you are going to fly in a civilian plane, because flying a military plane is much more obvious.

The fleet of planes the CIA uses is set up with the basic corporate structures any company is going to have. They have to file FAA flight plans and paperwork like any company. It can’t operate completely in the black.

Typically, the CIA planes will fly out of these rural airfields in North Carolina to Dulles, or they will fly overseas to Guantánamo Bay, Morocco or Afghanistan. Now, one of the tipoffs about these companies is that there’s a document that is like the Rosetta Stone-document for this type of research. The document lists the companies that have global access to land at military bases; the CIA planes are all on that list.

**You write about “extraordinary rendition.” What term does that term mean?**

Prior to 9/11, the CIA and FBI jointly ran a program that would grab international criminals that had allegedly committed crimes against Americans and bring them to American jails and courts to be adjudicated. It worked in secrecy because some of these people were in countries that didn’t have extradition treaties or good relationships with the United States and wouldn’t hand over an alleged criminal. After 9/11, the CIA turned it into a program that was more about grabbing terror suspects wherever they were in the world. They wanted to take them to secret jails where nobody would notice them and try to extract as much intelligence from them as possible, with no sense that they were ever going to end up in a court.

**What did you learn from getting so close to the “black sites” in Afghanistan?**



**A.C. Thompson and  
Trevor Paglen, authors  
of *Torture Taxi*.**

LORI SPEARS

Nobody was talking about or thinking about this issue. The Afghans would say, "Why are you so concerned with such a small number of prisoners from other countries that have been dragged here?" The justice system in Afghanistan is ad hoc. There are warlords who have secret jails in their houses. The U.S. military runs a network of 20 different detention centers that is essentially secret. These are jails that are publicly acknowledged, but the Afghan officials cannot get into them, the United Nations cannot get into them, the human rights groups cannot get into them, so they effectively operate in secret. A vast network of jails is holding hundreds of people. Really, when you talk about secrecy and indefinite detention, the problem is bigger than most people realize.

**In the book you describe all of Afghanistan as a black site. What do you mean by that?**

We checked out this facility that we believe is run by DynCorp. Afghan and jail officials could not tell us what goes on in there. The local police chief could not tell us what goes on there. This facility takes up the better part of a square block. It is guarded by huge heavy bomb barriers and row after row of guards with M-16s. The rumor is that prisoners are being held

there. The most we could get out of one guy was that it was a center for counterterrorist activity. When you encounter these detention centers that nobody can get into, you realize the whole country is sort of this black site.

**Why do you think the CIA uses these techniques when many experts have said torture is not a reliable method of obtaining accurate information?**

We spoke with the attorneys of the handful of men who have gotten out of the black sites. We interviewed prisoners who had been in military jails and they tell you terrible stories about being tortured. There's all sorts of evidence that torture doesn't work, so why is it done? I don't know. I can't answer that. What I can tell you is that a message is being sent out. It is about telegraphing a certain message. That message is not about what intelligence has been gathered, but what message can we send to his comrades: In effect, "Don't mess with the United States." Because if you do, you could end up in a dungeon with someone cutting up your penis.

**Can you explain the legal limbo many detainees exist in?**

There are people being held without

charges, without any acknowledgement that they are even being held incommunicado, completely outside the normal procedures: counsel, timeline, and all that sort of stuff. President Bush has given this impression that there are 14 gentlemen and we are now going to try them in a military tribunal. But the courts have said that these military tribunals are not legal. Another thing, there are many more than 14 people being held. It is a pretty amazing limbo. If these people were being dealt with like a POW, they would be held with some semblance of openness, not locked in a dungeon incommunicado.

**Were you surprised that Bush admitted there are secret prisons?**

I was surprised. But after the acknowledgement from the president, there was an immediate subterfuge—"14 guys we will prosecute." In fact there are at least 150 people.

**In the concluding chapter you write, "The facts show that the United States has become a nation that disappears people, practices torture. What's more, the torture planes, the renditions, the Executive Orders that produced them are here to stay." Have any of the recent developments made you hopeful that the system will be curtailed or even ended?**

One of the frustrating things is that Europe plays a tertiary role in this. Poland and Romania had secret prisons, but we are the people who run them. The American populace doesn't seem concerned. The Europeans are far more upset about this. This should be one of the key issues for American people of conscience. How can we be a nation that tortures people and flies them to dungeons? I am skeptical that anything major will change without public pressure. The Democrats have abandoned this issue. It doesn't poll well for them. Interestingly, the ones saying torture is bad are maverick Republicans. However, things can and do change. The Church Commission in the '70s put the screws to the CIA. That happened because people didn't want to be spied on, have the government disappearing people, and have their government meddling in the elections and affairs of other countries. It is totally possible to curb these excesses. When average people decide they don't want torture, things will change. ■



## YouTube in MeWorld

BY JESSICA CLARK

Americans are hams. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? The country's motto should be "look at me, look at me!" It's too easy to dismiss such behavior as exhibitionism or acting out. Today large swaths of the populace feel nonexistent without

an audience. This tendency to seek attention has accelerated with the recent explosion of social networking and video sharing Web sites. Ostensibly, these sites help us to connect with friends, families and the like-minded, but their names belie this. On MySpace and YouTube, making friends is secondary to generating a virtual fanbase, an online altar to yourself.

Why has this compulsion to see and be seen overtaken so many of us? Anthropologist Thomas de Zengotita explores this question in his 2005 book *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World and the Way You Live in It*. Although he finished the book months before YouTube launched in February 2005, his analysis couldn't be more on point.

For those of you not keyed into YouTube, the site—which allows visitors to upload, categorize and rate video clips—is single-handedly changing me-

dia-viewing habits. Its audience is growing rapidly: between January and June of 2006 the number of unique visitors to the site increased by 297 percent, according to Nielsen/NetRatings. Users are watching more than 70 million videos on the site daily, and the largest percentage of those visitors is between the ages of 12 and 17. By posting a TV pilot rejected by the WB—the ironically named *Nobody's Watching*, a fake reality show—fans generated enough interest to convince NBC to pick it up, and the site was instrumental in feeding this summer's muthaf\*\*\*ing *Snakes on a Plane* mania.

YouTube's hodgepodge of clips includes a little of everything that can be squished into in less than 10 minutes: snippets of commercial broadcasts, ads, music videos, bloopers, film trailers and even entire films segmented into short chunks. But content cre-



ated and uploaded by amateur videographers on their own time and their own dime that rules the roost.

Why all the would-be Woody Allens? De Zengotita blames this need to be center stage on the flattering nature of our media-saturated environment. All around us, billboards, televisions, computer screens and well-meaning experts address us as audience members and consumers. 24/7 media outlets serve up endless lifestyles, experiences and vantage points, bolstered by a “free to be you and me” celebration of diversity. Courted and pandered to at every turn, the audience becomes solipsistic and fickle. “The flattered self is spoiled,” De Zengotita writes, “It never gets enough. It feels unappreciated. It whines a lot. It wants attention.”

He calls this state of being the center of everyone’s solicitations “MeWorld,” noting that one of its most pernicious effects is an inescapable self-consciousness—a sense of always being “on.” Such “method acting,” as he dubs it, doesn’t only undermine the feeling of having a real self, but throws into question the reality of others. This dynamic played out this summer on YouTube, through the saga of *lonelygirl15*.

For those living offline: *lonelygirl15* is Bree, a 16-year-old homeschooled vlogger who hangs out in her bedroom with her friend Daniel and a puppet named Purple Monkey in a town that’s “like really boring.” Her nearly 30 posts, which began in mid-June, were fetching or irritating depending on your tastes, but they drew hundreds of thousands of viewers and even sustained attention from that arbiter of mainstream reality, *The New York Times*.

As Bree drew an audience, she also began to attract skeptics, some of whom posted their doubts about her veracity as video responses on YouTube, while oth-

ers doggedly tracked each clue on blogs and discussion boards. Wasn’t the lighting a bit too professional, her goofy face-making just a tad too cute, the story arc too neat? Was this a promotion for a film, an elaborate joke, a real-time role-playing game? Speculations, parodies and news stories proliferated, with one fan plunking down the 15 bucks to register the domain name [www.islonelygirl15real.com](http://www.islonelygirl15real.com).

## Attention is the currency that powers the new economy; why should it all accrue to those freaks and strivers currently celebrated as stars? To the barricades—better yet, to the camcorders!

com, giving it the tagline “Tracking the results of the world’s quest to find the truth!” By Sept. 7, the quest was over. A letter “To Our Incredible Fans” appeared on the discussion board at [www.lonelygirl15.com](http://www.lonelygirl15.com) from “The Creators,” who wrote:

We hope that you will join us in the continuing story of *Lonelygirl15*, and help us usher in an era of interactive storytelling where the line between “fan” and “star” has been removed, and dedicated fans like yourselves are paid for their efforts. This is an incredible time for the creator inside all of us.

“Bree,” it turns out, was a 19-year-old film student, the star of a project hatched by three aspiring filmmakers in their late-20s. Cue media-wide hand-wringing and widespread fan disgust.

On the one hand, this is yet another trivial story of new media micro-celebrity. On the other, it poses these questions: Why were viewers so drawn to Bree and her saccharine performances of precocious teenage girlhood? Why were they so quick to tear at her façade? So

obsessed with finding answers? And why does this minor incident mirror so many of today’s fan-star dynamics, in which viewers raise up celebrities only to revel in details of their divorces, breakups and drug habits?

It comes back to MeWorld. We want badly to identify with those we hope to emulate, while simultaneously rejecting them for their obvious artifice. Dissatis-

faction with the star system then drives viewers to seek their own spotlight. Attention is the currency that powers the new economy; why should it all accrue to those freaks and strivers currently celebrated as stars? To the barricades—better yet, to the camcorders!

**P**OLITICIANS—LONG KNOWN FOR being stage-managed, photopped and poll-tested—are particularly challenged in MeWorld. The rise of the progressive blogosphere demonstrates both a longing for authenticity and the ascendance of the audience to center-stage. But politicians are still trapped by the conventions of their trade.

“They face the threat of diminishment by comparison with virtual personalities, on the one hand, and, on the other, incessant pressure from journalists angling for a gotcha moment because that’s the only interesting thing they can do,” de Zengotita writes. “So politicians package themselves for protection—and end up looking phony as well as flawed.”

By allowing videos of gaffes to be isolated, posted and repeated, YouTube has in-



tensified and hastened the cycle of building up and tearing down. This summer, Sens. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.), George “Macaca” Allen (R-Va.) and Joe Biden (D-De.) all found themselves at the mercy of the newest of the new media for making statements that critics characterized as racist. In these cases, bad publicity really was bad publicity.

Ryan Lizza of *The New Republic* dissected the new political moment in an August 20 *New York Times* article. “If campaigns resemble reality television, where any moment of a candidate’s life can be captured on film and posted on the Web, will the last shreds of authenticity be stripped from our public officials?” he asked. “Will candidates be pushed further into a scripted bubble? In short, will YouTube democratize politics, or destroy it?”

Over on the Personal Democracy Forum, a Web site devoted to exploring “the tools powering the new civic conversation,” contributing editor Ari Melber put in a plug for the benefits of bottom-up media. “It’s not surprising that political aides are wary of user-driven technology,” he writes, “since it might force new information and scrutiny on conventional campaigns. Campaigns aim to deliver a message through several mediums, and campaign managers prefer top-down mediums that they can control or influence.”

Politicians are no longer able to tailor their messages to finite audiences: state fair attendees, senior citizens, the party faithful. Each appearance now holds the possibility of being captured and rebroadcast to the larger public. This means that politicians and their handlers need to develop new forms of communicating with a cynical and empowered audience.

How soon will it be before we see a lonelygirl15 political candidate—so appealingly genuine that she’s fake, so fake, she might just be real? Barack Obama comes to mind. Or perhaps the moment has already arrived: In late August, Democratic presidential candidate Mark Warner gave an address in the online virtual world Second Life in the guise of a pixelated videogame avatar—the next stage of inauthentic authenticity. It is available, of course, on YouTube. ■

**JESSICA CLARK** is the executive editor of *In These Times*. This article forms part of a larger research project on online video and public life for *The Center for Social Media at American University*.



## FILM

# Jesus Is Tragic

By Anthony Kaufman

**K**IDS ARE CUTE. Documentaries confirm this, from the nerdy word-whizzes of *Spellbound* to the agile dancers of *Mad Hot Ballroom*. But in the new documentary *Jesus Camp*, children are terrifying symbols of the Christian Right’s power to indoctrinate, manipulate and control.

The film’s creators, Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, directed another kid-centered chronicle, *The Boys of Baraka*, which follows a group of inner city teenage boys from Baltimore as they spend a year at a school in Kenya. In *Jesus Camp* they venture to the American heartland for an eye-opening journey into the lives of Evangelical Christians, specifically their Jesus-loving spawn. Conservatives may hail the film as a celebration of their supremacy; for secular humanists, Democrats and the 49 percent of Americans who don’t believe God created human beings in their present form, it’s a shocking wake-up call. (If you thought that satirical Web map “Jesusland” was a joke, think again.)

Devil’s Lake, N.D., is the site of the “Kids on Fire” summer camp, where Ewing and Grady’s cameras capture the behind-the-scenes preparations of Pastor Becky Fischer as she readies her mostly pre-pubescent flock to speak in tongues. (Children as young as six-years-old participate in the possessed proceedings.)

Outfitted in war paint and army fatigues, the kids are first shown taking part in a choreographed dance number that evokes both Jesus Christ and combat. The images imply—and more explicitly so as the movie goes on—that these youngsters are “warriors” for God, engaged in a Christian jihad to change the face of the nation. Islamic radicals may garner the newspaper headlines, but as *Jesus Camp* makes clear, America’s own homegrown radical fundamentalists may prove just as dangerous. Pastor Fischer puts it this way, “I want to see young people as committed to the cause of Jesus Christ as the young people are to Islam ... laying down their lives for the Gospel.”

If it sounds ominous—and it is—it’s also laughable. The rotund Fischer calls out to the children to make war on the government, primps in front of a mirror, asks God to bless her audiovisual equipment and damns Harry Potter (“Warlocks are enemies of God,” she yells. “In the Old Testament, Harry Potter would be put to death!”)

The filmmakers focus on three other characters, kids in the camp who are seen being home-schooled in creationism and pledging allegiance to the “Christian flag.” Levi O’Brien, an aspiring preacher and overly serious 13-year-old with a long mullet, says he was saved when he was just five years old. (The film reports that 43 percent of evangelicals are born again before the age of 13.) Tory Binger, 11, loves to dance but must resist the lure of Britney Spears-like dancing “for the flesh.” And Rachael Elhardt, 10 and the most obviously cute



of the bunch, is a prim, enthusiastic sycophant who wanders over to strangers in bowling alleys and asks them if they've accepted God. What will become of these kids when they grow up?

During a climactic sequence where an anti-abortion speaker whips the kids into a frenzy of tears, screams of "No More," and chants of "Righteous Judges," one senses they could ripen into murderers—of magistrates, legislators and abortion providers. "They're so usable in Christianity," says Pastor Fischer early in the film, touting ease with which young evangelicals can be employed by the movement.

As a break from the zealotry, Ewing and Grady make several visits to the Air America radio show "Ring of Fire," co-hosted by devout Methodist Mike Papantonio. While invoking faith, but also the separation of church and state, Papantonio offers a reasoned view of religion and its place in political life. He provides a valuable counterpoint to the self-righteous ravings of Fischer and her ilk. Papantonio's religion is a private one, he suggests, and by including him in the

film, Ewing and Grady smartly imply the movie's target isn't religion, just the rising strength of the extreme right.

But is it so extreme? The characters in *Jesus Camp* hardly represent a fringe movement. As a small group of them huddle in front of the White House, rocking back and forth in prayer with "Life" stickers taped across their mouths, one could dismiss them as a coven of freaks. But make no mistake, as National Association of Evangelicals President Ted Haggard says in the film, "If the evangelicals vote, they determine the election."

Indeed, *Jesus Camp* is framed—via the voices of Christian radio commentators—by the withdrawal of Harriet Myers' nomination for the Supreme Court and the appointment of Judge Samuel Alito: Proof positive of the power evangelicals hold in the Bush White House. In one of the more telling radio snippets, one defiant voice declares, "We are engaged in a culture war. We didn't start it, but by His Grace, we're going to finish it."

That leaves the rest of us with two options: prepare to fight or start packing. ■

## MUSEUMS

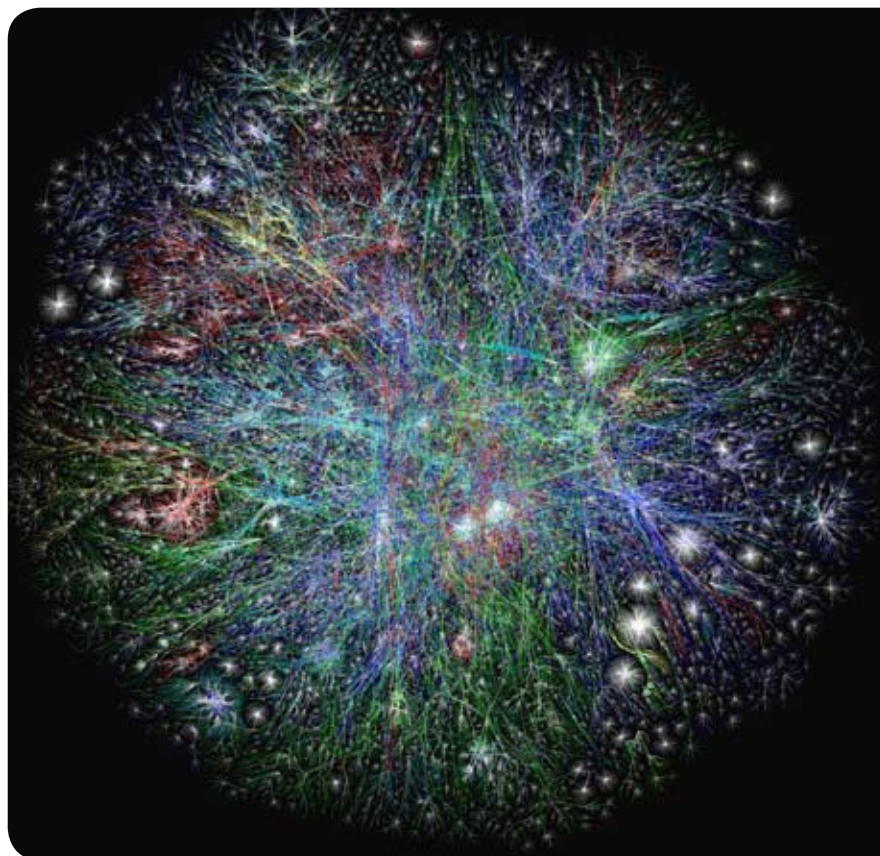
# History We Can Use

By Alexander Gourse

**S**TANDING IN THE kitchen of a rehabbed Manhattan tenement, a tour guide at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum tells visitors the story of the Baldizzis, a Sicilian-Catholic family who lived in the building from 1928 to 1935. Amid typical anecdotes of self-help in hard times, the guide discusses aspects of the immigrant family's experience that are usually glossed over in museums. Both parents came illegally to the United States. When Home Relief inspectors visited the apartment, the family would hide belongings that might make them ineligible for public aid. The father, a skilled cabinetmaker, found work through WPA programs until jobs in war industries became available.

The experiences of the Baldizzis give visitors a chance to think about the long history of current hot topics such as immigration and welfare in the United

## [ art space ]



### Exploding the Web

This map of the Internet was produced by the Opte Project ([opte.org](http://opte.org)), "a project created to make a visual representation of a space that is very much one-dimensional." Each color represents a geographic source of internet traffic:

**Red:** Asia Pacific

**Green:** Europe/Middle East/  
Central Asia/Africa

**Blue:** North America

**Yellow:** Latin American and  
Caribbean

**Cyan:** RFC1918 IP (private network)  
addresses

The map is on display as part of the exhibit *Massive Change: The Future of Global Design*, now on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Chicago.



States. And during the “Kitchen Conversation,” a post-tour program initiated by the Tenement Museum in 2004, visitors are encouraged by the museum’s staff to talk about the connections between past and present.

The Tenement Museum was founded by scholar-activist Ruth Abrams in the late ’80s. From its inception, Abrams wanted the Tenement Museum to be more than a place of passive reflection. Today, the museum attempts to create a discussion about the past and present not only during tours, but also through programs including ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes, after-hours community workshops that address contemporary immigration issues and public art exhibitions featuring works by neighborhood residents. The museum is becoming a neighborhood institution.

Walking a fine line between museum work and social service advocacy, the Tenement Museum felt isolated from the larger museum and public history community for years. That’s why, in 1999, Abrams and Liz Sevchenko, the museum’s vice president of programs, sent



out a message in a bottle, asking museums around the world whether they felt their own work had “a fundamental social mission.” The eight museums that responded became the founding members of the International Coalition of Historic Sites of Conscience, an organization that, as Sevchenko explains, serves as “a kind of a support group for misfit museums.”

“To us,” she says, “the connections between past and present, between history and civic participation, were absolutely natural. Our goal is to transform historic site museums from places of passive learning to places of active citizen engagement. We seek to use the history of what happened at our sites—whether it was a genocide, a violation of civil rights, or a triumph of democracy—as the foundation for dialogue about how and where these issues are alive today, and about what can be done to address them.”

Since 1999, member museums have shared resources and strategies on how to promote democracy and human rights through historical analysis. At the District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, visitors are presented with street signs and maps from a neighborhood that was gradually demolished after the South African government declared it a whites-only area in 1965.

Through its Dialogue for Democracy program, the museum takes children on a tour of the neighborhood’s history and institutions in hopes of helping them to assume the “rights and ... responsibilities as full and equal citizens in a newly democratic country.”

At the site of Perm-36, a restored Stalinist labor camp in Russia, the Gulag Museum uses structures from the old prison to discuss issues such as totalitarianism, state terror and the role of dissidents in an open political system. The museum asks its visitors, “What institutions or activities are fundamental to a democracy?” and “Is it possible that Russia could return to a repressive form of government?”

Not all of the Coalition museums use tragedy to discuss their topics. Although the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis is located at the site of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination, it celebrates the Civil Rights Movement through interactive presentations of sit-ins and the 1963 March on Washington. “Exploring the Legacy,” the Civil Rights Museum’s newest exhibit, encourages visitors to think about contemporary issues like gender inequality, poverty and the racial disparity in the U.S. criminal justice system.

But with so much of their energy focused on promoting public dialogue

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about human rights, democracy and social activism, do Coalition museums forego the traditional role of a history museum? Such institutions risk becoming excessively polemical—and anti-intellectual—in their interpretation of complex historical phenomena, says historian Richard John of the University of Illinois at Chicago. “History and social activism in my view are distinct activities,” he says. “There is nothing wrong with the latter, but it is often not history.”

Sevcenko has heard such criticisms before. She points out the years of painstaking historical research that have gone into the Tenement Museum—as well as other Coalition sites—as evidence that “we’re not so postmodern as to believe there’s no separation” between the roles of educator and activist. Separating historical truth from a sea of differing interpretations while still encouraging open discussion can be a challenging task. However, Sevcenko explains, “educators” at the Tenement Museum are specifically trained to encourage an egalitarian dialogue between visitors and museum staff while

providing concrete historical reference to the topics being discussed.

So far, educators at Coalition sites have mediated controversial and emotional discussions with relative success. The Coalition currently includes 17 accredited sites, and four new museums are poised to join them in 2006, including Constitution Hill in Johannesburg, South Africa, the site of the Old Fort prison that once held Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi.

The Tenement Museum recently won first prize from the American Association of Museums’ Brooking Paper on Creativity in Museums for its Shared Journeys Program. This series of after-hours workshops designed by education director Maggie Russell-Ciardi helps new immigrants compare their experiences to those of earlier waves of immigrants and migrants in the United States.

United by a belief that “stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values” should be the primary function of historic sites, the member institutions of the Coalition are gradually carving out a niche in the museum world. ■

## BOOKS

# The Tragedy of Gary Webb

By Doug Ireland

**W**ITH *KILL THE Messenger* (Nation Books/Avalon), Nick Schou, an editor at *Orange County Weekly*, provides a meticulous, balanced account of the life of Gary Webb, the former *San Jose Mercury News* reporter who, despite minor errors, basically got it right when he wrote the biggest story of his career. That story lifted the rug on a historical episode the mainstream media didn’t want to touch: how the Central Intelligence Agency turned a blind eye to drug dealing in furtherance of its covert support for the Nicaraguan contras. For his efforts, Webb was hounded out of journalism after a ferocious assault from America’s most prestigious newspapers, which Schou documents in painstaking and shameful detail. When Webb—who had once shared a Pulitzer Prize for his reporting—committed suicide in December 2004, it was the last chapter in a real-life American tragedy.

Webb was not the first one on to the story. AP reporter Robert Parry had

## spin cycle

BY JESSICA CLARK AND TRACY VAN SLYKE

### Media Pundit or Media Critic?

In his new book, *Cable News Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media*, Jeff Cohen, founder of the preeminent media watchdog group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), offers readers an insiders look at the soulless world of corporate media. Cohen’s book, a fun read, bucks the dryness of most media criticism. It’s chock full of stories about his interactions with TV pundits (you’ll find yourself cheering at some of the transcripts), examinations of the corporate media’s self-interest, and his own

struggles to work in and outside the system at the same time.

Starting in the ’80s, Cohen and FAIR fought tirelessly to fact-check the corporate and right-wing media. After initially reluctant guest appearances on CNN’s “Crossfire,” he eventually embraced his role as an on-air personality. His mission: balancing out the din of the right-wing and centrist pundits on cable news with strong and true progressive voices.

“For two decades, I’ve been preoccupied with one issue above all others: that both ends of the political spectrum get their say in the media,”

Cohen writes. “The issue haunted me at FAIR. It haunted my TV career. It haunts my dreams. One reason (among many) that I worked so hard to retire George W. Bush in 2004 was my nightmare that a defeated John Kerry would be hired by cable news to represent ‘the left’ day after day on a TV debate show.”

In 1995, after coming being considered for one of Crossfire’s new co-hosts and then shunted aside for a less progressive voice, Cohen joined Fox News’ “News Watch” as a regular guest. He then embarked to MSNBC, where his work for Phil Donahue was

spiked over post-9/11 fears that the show was too liberal and antiwar.

While the influence of the Internet is steadily growing, cable news and their offspring (CNBC and CNN Headline News) continue to be the places where political messaging is shaped. Cohen’s book reminds us that a battle still needs to be fought on the television airwaves and, through his victories and mistakes, he shows how to confront the challenges we face.

been forced out of his job at the wire service for pursuing it. The U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Narcotics and Terrorism, chaired by Sen. John Kerry, conducted an investigation into the contras' drug trafficking in 1987-88 that had documented (among other things) how CIA cargo planes ferried arms to the contras and then carried cocaine back to military bases and remote airfields on the return flights. But, as Schou notes, "Because of its sensitive nature, the committee ... sealed most of the testimony, and Kerry's investigation got scant play in the national news media."

The Kerry investigation was mainly concerned with cocaine coming into the U.S. East Coast. Webb's 1996 series for the *Mercury News*, based on a year-long investigation, looked at the cocaine traffic in Los Angeles, which was then known as "the crack capital of the world." Webb detailed how "Freeway" Ricky Ross, the first '80s crack millionaire and a crack kingpin in L.A.'s South Central neighborhood, had been supplied with crack cocaine by Nicaraguan exiles and contra supporters with CIA connections. Webb discovered an affidavit from the L.A. County Sheriff's Department that said that the coke profits of Ross's suppliers "are transported to Florida and laundered through ... a chain of banks in Florida. ... From this bank the monies are filtered to the Contra rebels to buy arms in the war in Nicaragua."

Webb's articles, however, were unjustifiably hyped by the *Mercury News*' editors, who, according to Schou, were hungry to compete with the media Big Boys. The series ran with war-sized headlines and a silhouette of a man smoking a crack pipe superimposed on the official seal of the CIA. "Dark Alliance: The Story Behind the Crack Explosion," screamed the paper, with a subhead claiming that "Crack Plague's Roots Are in Nicaraguan War."

The story got away from Webb and took on a life of its own, fueled by anger and despair in black communities being destroyed by the crack epidemic and the lethal gang wars surrounding it. As Schou puts it, "Dark Alliance" created an alliance of conspiracy theorists, from some "on the left who believed the CIA had deliberately started the crack epidemic to commit genocide against black people" to "right-wing followers of Lyndon LaRouche, who saw the story as further proof that George Bush Sr. and the Queen of England be-

## excerpt



### My Cell in Guantánamo

*Moazzam Begg is a second-generation British Muslim. In 2002, he was arrested in Pakistan and held for two years by the United States as an "enemy combatant." He describes his experiences in Enemy Combatant: My Imprisonment at Guantánamo, Bagram, and Kandahar (New Press). Below is his description of his first night in Guantánamo. In These Times will be running a chapter-length excerpt from this book on our Web site, [www.inthesetimes.com](http://www.inthesetimes.com), in October.*

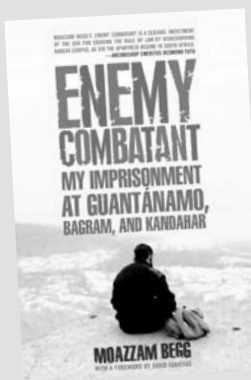
All I had in the cell was a sheet and a roll of toilet paper, not even my glasses. I asked for something that I could use as a prayer mat, and they brought a thin camping mat, which became my mattress for the next two years.

I wanted to pray immediately. I asked the MPs which direction was east, but they weren't sure. That told me there were no other prisoners here, otherwise the guards would have known, since all the detainees would have asked the same question. Or was it that they feared my knowledge of directions could allow me to calculate my position on the island—a potential breach of security? I performed my prayer, and then I sat for a while, think-

ing. Looking at the paintwork and clean linoleum floor outside, I thought it was obvious that this place was recently constructed, and probably had never been used before.

Then I lay down. I was still feeling quite hazy from the drugs on the plane. They gave me something which they said was a blanket, but which was made of a plastic-type material. There was no cotton or wool or anything like that in it, and it couldn't keep me warm with the air-conditioning on—which was how the guards kept the room most of the time.

Later on I was told it was a suicide blanket—meaning it could not be torn up to make a noose.



long to a secret cabal that controls the planet." Opportunistic politicians like Rep. Cynthia McKinney (D-Ga.)—who exclaimed on the floor of Congress that "CIA" stood for "Central Intoxication Agency"—seized on Webb's story to grab headlines for themselves. The "Dark Alliance" series quickly became a national cause célèbre.

The *Los Angeles Times*—embarrassingly scooped on its own turf by Webb—reacted by assigning no less than two dozen reporters to what one of them described as the "Get Gary Webb Team," running a takedown series on the "Dark Alliance" stories that dwarfed them in size. The *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* piled on with multiple stories discrediting not just what Webb had written, but Webb himself, delving into his past to come up with mud to throw. Most of these papers' "deconstructions" of Webb's reporting were based on unnamed government sources. But the damage was

done. In the end, the very *Mercury News* editors who'd made exaggerated claims for Webb's series publicly disowned him in an editorial while refusing to print stories Webb wrote further documenting his series. Demoted to a remote police beat, Webb left the paper.

Unable to get another reporting job on any U.S. daily, his marriage destroyed by the intensity of his "Dark Alliance" experience, a depressed Webb killed himself. In Schou's telling, he was the victim of incompetent editors and of a media feeding frenzy that the *Washington Post's* own ombudsman later described as misplaced.

Throughout *Kill the Messenger*, Schou does fresh reporting that bolsters some of Webb's findings. He also interviews some of those who helped incinerate Webb and who now admit they went overboard. The book is an important cautionary tale for anyone considering a career in investigative journalism. And the moral is: It's often dangerous to speak truth to power. ■



BY TERRY J. ALLEN

# Counterfeit Drugs: Infected with Greed



**C**OUNTERFEIT PHARMACEUTICALS ARE flooding hospitals, Web sites, pharmacies and street markets around the world. Visibly indistinguishable from life-saving medicine, the pharmafakes plague the

developing world, affecting millions of people and undermining confidence in public health.

Counterfeit drug sales will reach \$75 billion globally in 2010, a more than 90 percent increase from 2005, according to the Center for Medicines in the Public Interest. Some pharmafakes enter the United States hidden in plain sight inside the 70,000 packages of legitimate medicines that pass through JFK and Miami airports alone, each day.

But the developing world is where most fakes are manufactured, most victims live and where up to half the drugs in some countries are bogus.

Feeding on desperate need and feasting off fabulous profits, narcotics and arms traffickers are embracing this global industry. Lack of international agreement, uncoordinated enforcement and low penalties ensure that drug counterfeiters enjoy that most traditional of capitalist draws: high profit with low risk.

Part of the blame goes to a "war on terror" that has sucked up international policing efforts and "is making it harder to look at the fake drug trade," Dora Akunyili told *In These Times*. In 2001 Akunyili, a pharamcologist in her 50s, accepted what has been called "the most dangerous job in Nigeria," heading the country's National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC).

Until Akunyili's reforms took hold, Nigeria was the epicenter of the pharmafake pandemic. In 2003, when sur-

geons there administered adrenaline to restart the hearts of anesthetized children, a useless counterfeit left four dead on the operating table. A painkiller made from toxic ethylene glycol killed more than 100 Nigerian children. A Nigerian newspaper reported that "80 percent of cases of kidney failure in the country are linked to the intake of fake drugs."

The counterfeit medicine trade "is mass murder but not with guns," says Akunyili. "It is solely profit motivated, but the money the counterfeit drug makers make can be plowed into evil. It is also a form of terrorism against public health as well as an act of economic sabotage."

Akunyili came by her commitment the hard way: Fake insulin killed her diabetic sister. As agency head, she found that only 20 percent of the country's drugs were legitimate and vowed to put the pharmafake manufacturers and dealers out of business. She raided warehouses, seized tons of pharmafakes, burned them in the street and ordered the arrest of notorious traffickers who had operated with impunity for decades.

The price that traffickers put on her head was evidence of the campaign's efficacy. One day as she rode to work, assassins opened fire on her car. One bullet pierced her headwrap and grazed her skull. Another shot killed a bystander. Akunyili sent her children abroad and accelerated her campaign. She faced down threats, blackmail and a corrupt legal system that let off major dealers despite ironclad cases, one of which included a boastful confession.

Factories in China and India are the main source of a counterfeit trade that is growing faster than cholera in a warm petri dish. China's new capitalists, skilled in knocking off Gucci and Nike, are turning to Lipitor and Norvasc. Some fakes are far cheaper than the real drug, some are not even a bar-

gain, and some, especially a new wave of Russian knockoffs, are as effective as expensive originals. Consumers, however, have no way to know if their pill is crushed chalk or toxic waste; if they bought amusingly impotent Viagra or an antibiotic, an antiretroviral or malarial drug with doses too low to work, but high enough to encourage disease-resistant strains that circle the globe inside unknowing travelers.

"Bacteria don't need visas," says Akunyili, who argues that even if human compassion fails to inspire Western officials to tackle the problem, enlightened self-interest should. Health experts point out that 2 percent of TB cases are "extremely drug resistant," and view with alarm a new South African TB strain, resistant to all antibiotics, that killed 52 of the 53 people infected.

The counterfeits also create resistance to public health campaigns. After watching pharmafakes fail or kill, people may reject polio vaccinations, anti-malaria drugs, and HIV/AIDS treatments and preventions. Experts worry that fake Tamiflu available on the internet may undermine efforts to contain bird flu if it evolves into a serious human threat. The pharmafake trade also lends credence to the view that all Western medical initiatives are profit-driven fraud and bolsters quacks promoting such home-grown tragedies as treating AIDS with garlic and beetroot instead of antiretrovirals, as Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, South Africa's criminally deluded minister of health, did before his resignation.


As the trafficking grows, pharmaceutical corporations have failed to attack the problem with the zeal they unleash to maintain high prices, protect patents and create demand for new lifestyle drugs. Next month, I'll examine that seemingly strange reticence. ■

**CONTACT** Terry J. Allen at [tallen@igc.org](mailto:tallen@igc.org)

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# Cola Wars

Continued from back page

on full display each Sunday in the Chamula town square. The equivalent of the county seat of the 113-community municipality of San Juan Chamula, the town is home to a thriving outdoor market, which sells everything from plastic household items and sides of beef to tourist trinkets. It is also home to the traditional authorities, leaders of the church and the local government. Each week, two or three dozen of them sit in a solemn line in their huaraches, short wool tunics and straw hats with thick fringe of bright ribbons hanging so low as to obscure their faces. Surrounding them are the other pillars of power: the Church of St. John the Baptist, with its candles and cola, the headquarters of the municipal president, and the headquarters of the PRI—the only political party permitted in the town.

The caciques say, “To break with the PRI is to break with tradition.” The tradition is serving them well; the caciques own the Coke and Pepsi warehouses at the edge of town, each containing up to six trucks. Each truck is equipped to carry 180 cases of soda, or 4,320 bottles, out to the village stores.

Sometimes the cola racket can get ugly, as it did in the community of Mitzitón, where the richest and most powerful cacique, José Santíz, controlled both the local PRI governing council and the only store. The Coca-Cola company gave him a refrigerator, chairs, tables and other gifts in exchange for selling a minimum amount of soda each month. Santíz, in turn, forced other members of the council to raise the money to buy eight or nine cases of Coke from him each month; otherwise, he said, he would close the much-needed store. “For us it was very difficult . . . to be giving money for this devil’s soft drink,” said one council member who requested anonymity. In 2000, some community members organized against the Coke-cacique nexus; in response, thugs burned down one family’s home and threatened others with beatings. About 60 families permanently fled the area.

**C**OKE’S HOLD ON Mexico extends beyond both Chiapas and the PRI. The PRI held a lock on the presidency for 71 years, until finally losing in 2000 to Vicente Fox of the National Ac-

tion Party, or PAN. Fox’s last job before becoming a politician was serving as president of the Coca-Cola Corporation of Mexico and Latin America. Currently Coke controls 60 percent of the Mexican soda market, while Pepsi has 30 percent.

According to the *New York Times*, 2006 first-quarter profits for the multinational rose to \$1.11 billion, largely due to increased sales in Latin America and China. According to the giant beverage processing company Fomento Económico Mexicano, or FEMSA, each Mexican consumes an average of 483 8-ounce glasses of Coke per year, in a country where more than 12 million citizens do not have access to potable water.

Coke is also widely produced in Mexico, an arrangement that is threatening the country’s water supplies and undercutting indigenous control of natural resources. It takes three cups of water to make one cup of Coke. Since 2000, Coca-Cola has negotiated 27 water concessions from the Mexican government. Nineteen of the concessions are for the extraction of water from aquifers and from 15 different rivers, some of which belong to indigenous peoples. Eight concessions are for the right of Coke to dump its industrial waste into public waters. To aid the extractive and dumping processes, Fox—with help from the World Bank—has successfully pursued water privatization, as well as a massive land privatization program, that allowed companies free access to all the resources on the land, including water.

After Fox’s victory, Coca-Cola began bottling water from the richest aquifer in the Chiapan town of San Cristóbal de las Casas, an ecological reserve administered by a conservation group Pronatura, which receives money from Coca-Cola Mexico. In 2004, the Coke plant in San Cristóbal de las Casas used 107,332,391 liters of water—about as much as 200,000 homes.

In 2003, following the international call sent out by many groups and networks at the World Social Forum, organizations in Chiapas launched a boycott against Coca-Cola. They cited corporate domination, the assassination of unionized workers at a Coke plant in Colombia, labor rights violations and toxic leakages as reasons for the boycott. But the primary demand for the boycotters is an end to Coke’s growing domination of the nation’s water, especially on indigenous territories.

Chiapas being the locus of the world’s

first revolution against neoliberalism, boycott initiators had expected that that revolution’s proponents would be strong constituents. In fact, the Zapatistas continue to be heavy consumers of Coca-Cola overall, though some autonomous communities have taken on the campaign. Subcomandante Marcos himself is a Coca-Cola drinker, claims Eduardo Sánchez, an exasperated Zapatista boycott organizer. Still, Sánchez is unable to hide his grin as he repeats what Marcos is reported to have said: “We have a way to get rid of Coke. We will drink every last bottle.”

Nevertheless, the boycott is growing steadily in Chiapas and, to a lesser degree, throughout Mexico. Down the road past Chamula one sees, for the first time in miles, something other than ads for Coke or Pepsi—a painted sign advertising Mexican product Big Cola which is not connected to caciques, the PRI or religious ritual. Two years ago, the storeowner’s son convinced his father to switch from Coke. Representatives of Coca-Cola showed up at the shop and told the owner that Big Cola was making people sick. The Coke reps also told the owner that if he would give them his three Big Cola trucks, they would give him five Coca-Cola trucks in exchange. Big Cola remains.

Some communities have banished Coke. In Xoxocotla, an indigenous village in the southern state of Morelos, after the company told shop owners that they would have to stop selling other soft drinks if they wanted to keep purchasing Coke, residents held an assembly in the plaza and decided to kick the corporation and its products out of their village.

Surveying the caciques as they sit in front of St. John the Baptist Church one Sunday afternoon, Gustavo Castro Soto, a Chiapas-based intellectual author of the boycott, says, “Consciousness about the role of Coca-Cola relates to the economy, society, politics, culture and even the military. It has to do with human rights, labor rights, rights of indigenous peoples, and control of lands and water by the multinational. This consciousness will grow and integrate citizens, communities, and universities into a giant boycott. It all starts with our consumption habits.” ■

**BEVERLY BELL** coordinates *Other Worlds*, a multi-media collaborative to educate the U.S. and Latin American public on globalization and alternative economies.





BY BEVERLY BELL

**T**HOUSANDS OF CANDLES FLICKER in the dim chamber. The air is thick with the smoke from copal incense. On the altar, men in black wool tunics and white knee-length pants play solemn music on drums and gourds. Below them, a score of Tzotzil Indians chant in small circles on the pine needle-covered floor. In the center of each circle are candles, eggs, copal and *pox*—fermented corn mash—in an old glass container, stopped with a corn cob. And next to the *pox* is a half-liter bottle of Coca-Cola or Pepsi.

In the 484-year-old Church of St. John the Baptist, in Chamula, a town of 60,000 in Chiapas, Mexico, those bottles indicate the intersection of religion, politics, water and consumer markets.

In the United States, Coke and Pepsi vie for monopoly contracts with schools and universities. In Chiapas, the stakes in the soft drink war are as high as the purity of one's soul.

Traveling through the cold highlands of the San Juan Chamula municipality any Saturday afternoon, one regularly encounters a scene resembling a battleground: dozens of bodies sprawled on the ground, arms and legs sometimes extending perilously into the road. At the epicenter of each of these scenes are plastic tables and chairs in front of a diminutive wooden store. There, men, women and children who are either on their way to collapse, or who have resuscitated themselves and are back for more, sit drinking *pox*, which means "mad dog" in Tzotzil.

Along with *pox*, they swig Coke or Pepsi, depending on whose store they patronize; each store sells only one brand.

Like fireworks and copal, *pox* is a sacrament in a local religion that blends Catholicism with elements of native tradition. It is a sacred drink that cleanses the soul; the more *pox* one drinks, the greater the purification. Over the past several decades the *caciques*—local elites who wield economic and political power and control the soft drink concession—have convinced the faithful that *pox* should be drunk with Coke or Pepsi, depending on who is doing the proselytizing. They say the cola induces burping, which releases evil from the soul.

The *caciques* and their affiliated drink companies do a booming business—nevermind that the beverages sell for 50 U.S. cents a can, exactly the average daily income. Purchasing a soda often means not purchasing food, and Chiapas has one of the highest rates of both malnutrition and Coke consumption in Mexico.

The drinks also play a political role. A few months before each election, *caciques* begin providing store owners with all their cola products free of charge. In exchange, each store owner will support his *cacique*-sponsor's preferred candidate in the local election, which is invariably a choice between two politicians from the Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI). In turn, the customers of each store get all the cola they want for free, provided they vote for the owner's candidate. This arrangement helps both the *caciques* and the PRI to retain their hold on power.

This nexus of politics, religion and commerce is

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# COLA WARS IN MEXICO